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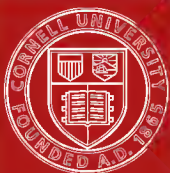
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JOHN F.

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A Thesis presented to the faculty of Cornell University
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
June, 1896.



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University of Pennsylvania '23

THE DOCTRINE
OF
THE FREEDOM OF THE WILL
IN
FICHTE'S PHILOSOPHY.

BY
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RICHMOND, IND.:
M. CULLATON & CO., BOOK AND JOB PRINTERS.
1900.

A. 140059

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PREFACE.

This essay is a critical study of the doctrine of the freedom of the will, as found in Fichte's philosophy, and especially in his ethical treatises. In Part I. the attempt has been made to give a fair and just exposition of what Fichte really taught on the subject, and, in order that the exposition should be distorted as little as possible through misinterpretation, exact quotations have been given wherever it seemed practicable to do so. Part II. is devoted to a critical examination of the validity of the doctrine as it is presented by Fichte.

Fichte's own works are the basis of the essay, and the references are to Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Sämmtliche Werke, herausgegeben von J. H. Fichte*. The name of the treatise quoted from, or referred to, has been stated in each case, in order that the significance of the quotation may be the better understood.

I am under special obligation to President J. G. Schurman for his encouragement, inspiration, and criticism given in the direction of the work; and to Professor J. E. Creighton, under whose efficient leadership my serious study of Fichte's philosophy was first undertaken.

J. F. B.

PART I.—EXPOSITION.

INTRODUCTORY.

In the words ‘unity’ and ‘freedom’ is to be found the key to Fichte’s entire philosophical system. To formulate a philosophy whose every part should radiate from a single, absolute principle, was the end to the attainment of which his keen constructive intellect aspired. To vindicate the moral freedom of the individual was the imperative demand of his fervent ethical nature. To satisfy this demand of logical thought on the one hand, and of moral impulse on the other, is his constant effort; and, although he sometimes seems to lose himself in a bewildering maze of ‘deductions’ and ‘proofs,’ he invariably closes the discussion in hand with one or both of these ends consciously in view. It was the strength of his desire for a monistic system of thought, that led him while yet a theological student, to accept Spinozism, with its sweeping determinism, even though the longings of his moral nature cried out against it. It was the satisfaction of this hitherto unsatisfied longing that led him to rejoice so greatly in his discovery of the “new gospel” of the Kantian philosophy, which, in its underlying principles, was to satisfy both the logical demand for unity and the ethical longing for freedom.

Whether Fichte was really as successful as he himself thought he was, in constructing a system of philosophy that should contain a single, fundamental principle, and, whether in this claim to unity in all his philosophical treatises, he was always consistent with himself, it is not within the province of this study to determine. We have only to show, as clearly as we may be able to do, what Fichte's doctrine of freedom really was, and then to examine the tenability of the theory. This being our purpose, we shall introduce so much, and only so much of his metaphysical thought as may be helpful in the understanding of the subject in hand. We shall avoid, so far as possible, the peculiarly technical and difficult terminology of the author, and, where this is impossible, we shall try to translate this terminology into such other terms as, while they may lay little claim to being transcendental, may yet lay some claim to being perspicuous.

CHAPTER I.

THE POSSIBILITY OF A SYSTEM OF PHILOSOPHY.

For Fichte the first requirement of a system of philosophy is that it should be all of one piece. There must be one absolute, fundamental principle from which all other principles can be deduced, and by reference to which everything can be explained.¹ If there be not one such principle, then, in the attempt to reach a resting place for thought, we either fall into an infinite regression, and no system is possible; or, if there be more than one absolute principle, then there must be erected on them, not one system, but more than one, and the philosophical aspiration for one system is still unsatisfied.² The sensible world and the intelligible world, and the latter in both the theoretical and the practical sphere, must alike find their ground and explanation in one absolute fundamental principle. Kant forgot this fact, "for he nowhere treated the ground principle of all philosophy, but, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, only the theoretical, in which the categorical imperative could not be discussed; and, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, only the practical, in which he had

¹Ueber den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre, Werke I., 38-40.

²Ibid, Werke I., 52-54.

to do merely with the content of consciousness, and the question as to its nature could not arise."¹ To find, then, the one, absolute, fundamental principle that shall explain the sensible and the intelligible, the theoretical and the practical alike, is the task of the philosopher.²

There are in general two systems of philosophy, each of which claims to fulfill the conditions required by philosophical thought and to explain all phenomena by reference to one absolute, fundamental principle. The one of these systems Fichte calls Dogmatism or Dogmatic Realism, the other, Idealism.³

"A system of speculative philosophy that would explain the idea (*Vorstellung*) by positing the Non-Ego as cause of the idea, and the idea as effect of the Non-Ego, so that the Non-Ego is the real ground of all, and is absolutely because it is and what it is, (Spinoza's necessity); and so that, moreover, the Ego is merely an accident of the Non-Ego and not substance at all; such a system is material Spinozism or Dogmatic Realism."⁴ Dogmatism would explain the intelligible by the sensible, consciousness by the thing. The thing is the essence, the substance, consciousness an accident belonging to it. The thing is independent.⁵ The object that appears before the mind with

¹ Zweite Einleitung, Werke I., 472.

² Erste Einleitung, Werke I., 423.

³ Grundlage, Werke I., 119, 120, note, 155: Erste Einleitung, Werke I., 426.

⁴ Grundlage, Werke I., 153.

⁵ Erste Einleitung, Werke I., 431, 433.

the feeling of necessity is to be regarded as a thing-in-itself, and is the ground of explanation of all consciousness and all experience.¹

Idealism has a different object, that is, it puts forward a different ground for the explanation of experience. In the Ego, in consciousness—and critical Idealism makes no pretense of going beyond the facts of consciousness, except by abstraction²—there are always two factors present, viz.: the subjective and the objective. Dogmatism attempts to explain this duality in consciousness by referring the subjective to the objective as thing-in-itself, for explanation. But Dogmatism does not satisfy the philosophic instinct of the idealist, hence the latter takes the only other road that is open, and attempts to explain experience by referring the objective to the subjective. But what is the subjective? How does it manifest itself to us? Can we form a conception of it such that the objective can be referred to it for explanation? Our fundamental conception of the subjective, as it appears to us in consciousness by means of an intellectual intuition (*intellektuelle Anschauung*), is that of a free activity. I act and I act as I choose, or, if I do not act, I remain passive by my own free choice. Of this activity or passivity I am directly conscious. No one can prove it to me, nor can I describe it to another, except in a merely

¹ Erste Einleitung, Werke I., 426-428, 430.

² Ibid, Werke I., 425; Sonnenklarer Bericht, Werke II., 333; Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 16-17.

negative way. It is not a sensible but an intellectual intuition. I am directly conscious of myself, of the Ego as acting. The Ego exists only as it acts, or rather, only as activity.¹ We cannot predicate existence of it apart from activity.² The essence of the Ego is activity.³ This is the one fundamental principle to which the idealist reduces all conscious experience. Instead of saying that our conscious experience is explainable through the thing-in-itself by means of the category of necessary mechanical causality, as the dogmatist claims, the idealist urges that all experience can be explained only through the activity of the Ego by means of the category of free causality. Granted the assumptions of the dogmatist, the truth of his theory follows with logical necessity. Granted the assumption of the idealist, and the truth of his theory follows with equally logical necessity. Neither theory can be absolutely disproved by the other.⁴

How, then, shall we decide which system to choose? In Fichte's own words we give the answer: "The kind of philosophy one chooses, depends upon the kind of a man one is; for a philosophical system is not a dead piece of furniture to be rejected or accepted as one pleases, but it is animated by the soul of the man who has it. One who is indolent by nature, or who has become so through mental slavery, learned luxury and vanity, will never rise to Ideal-

¹ Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 38, 57.

² Erste Einleitung, Werke I., 440.

³ Grundlage, Werke I., 97; Grundlage des Naturrechts, Werke III., 22.

⁴ Erste Einleitung, Werke I., 429.

ism.”¹ This statement must not be interpreted to mean that Fichte thinks there is no theoretical ground for preferring one system to the other. In the quotation just given, and in other statements bearing a similar import,² there is perceptible a delicate touch of irony, and a quiet contempt for the thinker who can so far overlook the facts of common consciousness as to be able to admit the assumptions of the dogmatic school. For his own mind a mere statement of these required assumptions is sufficient refutation of the system. But, nevertheless, he proceeds to give cogent theoretical reasons why dogmatism is not satisfactory, which reasons may be briefly stated as follows.

Dogmatism does not afford a satisfactory explanation of the phenomena of consciousness. Its ground of explanation is the thing-in-itself, mere being, working through the concept of mechanical causality. But this will not do, in the first place, because the thing-in-itself is a chimera, and we can form no conception of it.³ What could mere being mean without some consciousness for which it exists?⁴ By hypothesis it has no consciousness in itself, and, if we do away with consciousness apart from the thing, as the theory requires, we have left mere being without consciousness. Such a conception is not only unmeaning, but impossible to creatures consti-

¹ Erste Einleitung, Werke I., 434.

² Ibid, Werke I., 432-433, 443-444.

³ Ibid, Werke I., 431.

⁴ Sittenlehre of 1793, Werke IV., 17.

tuted as we are.¹ This objection alone is sufficient to overthrow the whole system of Dogmatism.² But there is yet another objection to the theory. If we grant for the sake of the argument the possibility of the conception just referred to, it can never account for the facts of consciousness, representation, ideas, the Ego. Given the thing-in-itself, mere being, being without consciousness of being; required, all the facts of conscious experience. This same thing-in-itself, acting through the category of necessary causality, is to produce representation, the Ego, being and consciousness of being in one.³ But being as an ultimate, can not, through the category of causality, produce that which it does not itself contain. At most it can only produce more being.⁴ It can not produce both being and consciousness of being, and this is just what is required. How, then, are we to bridge the chasm between being as the ultimate principle, and consciousness, which is a fact of common experience?⁵ Clearly the second objection is also valid and the theory fails. A complete dogmatism destroys itself since it destroys the possibility of consciousness.⁶

There is a third argument, a practical one, in favor of Idealism and against Dogmatism, viz.: the fact that freedom must be guaranteed to the indi-

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1798, *Werke* IV., 30.

² *Erste Einleitung*, *Werke* I., 431.

³ *Ibid*, *Werke* I., 435-436.

⁴ *Ibid*, *Werke* I., 436.

⁵ *Ibid*, *Werke* I., 431, 437-438.

⁶ *Grundlage*, *Werke* I., 120.

vidual in order that he may maintain his dignity as a man, and that the deepest longings of his moral nature may be satisfied; and this, Dogmatism does not accomplish. Even if the theoretic arguments for the two systems were absolutely equal, this practical demand of the moral nature must turn the balance in favor of Idealism.¹

Dogmatism can satisfy only those who think everything explainable through the category of causality, a causality that is mechanical and necessary.² In the mind of such a thinker, there can be no conception of freedom as real.³ "Every logical dogmatist is necessarily a fatalist. He does not deny the fact of consciousness that we regard ourselves as free, but he proves from his principle the falseness of the testimony."⁴ He must regard the facts of consciousness as phenomena differing not in kind, but only in degree from the thing-in-itself, which he makes the ground of explanation of all experience.⁵ Nevertheless we must accept this theory of Dogmatism, with all the concessions which it demands, unless we can find a way of escape by postulating the freedom and self-dependence of the Ego. The idealist makes this postulate, the dogmatist denies it. So far apart are they at the beginning, and, granted the fundamental assumptions of either system, there

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1798, *Werke* IV., 53-54.

² *Erste Einleitung*, *Werke* I., 437-439.

³ *Sittenlehre* of 1798, *Werke* IV., 136.

⁴ *Erste Einleitung*, *Werke* I., 430.

⁵ *Ibid*, *Werke* I., 437; *Die Thatfachen des Bewusstseyns*, *Werke* II., 623-624.

is no transition from one to the other. But for Fichte there is no such thing as sacrificing the independence of the Ego to that of the thing-in-itself, and he becomes the outspoken advocate of Idealism.¹

So far we have followed the line of approach to Fichte's own philosophical camp. We have found that the unity of the system and the freedom of the individual are two ideas which he keeps constantly in view; that the principle of unity is to be found in each of two proposed systems, Dogmatism and Idealism, and, granted the fundamental assumptions underlying these systems, neither of them can, by any possible means, be refuted by the advocates of the opposing system; and, lastly, we have seen that, for both theoretical and practical reasons, Fichte clings to Idealism. Before entering our leader's camp, it will be necessary to consider briefly the method of the Fichtean philosophy.

For Fichte the task of all philosophy is "to give the ground of all experience."² This explanation, if it is to be had at all, will be found in a coherent system of thought, based on a single, unproved and unprovable, absolute, fundamental principle.³ In so far as this absolute principle can not be proved, it may be said that the system as a whole can not be proved, since every step in the system is dependent for its certainty upon this ground principle.⁴ But, unless

¹ Erste Einleitung, Werke I., 432; Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 54.

² Ibid, Werke I., 423.

³ Grundlage, Werke I., 47, 48, 52, 60.

⁴ Ibid, Werke I., 43.

the validity of thought is to be destroyed altogether, it must have a starting point in some accepted though unproved proposition. Fichte takes as this starting-point a principle which, he says, needs not the proof that is denied to it, for it appears as a direct fact of experience in every consciousness, as a fact which no one will deny.¹ It is the most fundamental, the most incontrovertible fact of all consciousness. By hypothesis now this ground principle is the one absolute principle upon which the only true system of philosophy can be founded. The validity of this principle, *as a fact of experience*, needs no proof, for it appears directly in all consciousness. But its validity, *as ground principle of a system of philosophy*, does need proof, and this proof can be found only in the fact that a satisfactory system of philosophy is actually constructed on it as ground principle thereof. That a system of thought is possible at all, can only be proved by the actual construction of such a system, and that the principle which we have submitted by hypothesis as the ground principle of all philosophy, is the correct one, we can know only when it is proved such by the actual construction of such system of philosophy upon such ground principle. In so far, then, as the ground principle of all philosophy is unproved and unprovable, it may be said that the system of philosophy erected on such ground principle, can not be proved true. On the other hand, accepting such principle as true in itself, regardless

¹ Grundlage, Werke I., 95.

of its relation to philosophy, the system of philosophy erected on it is absolutely proven, and it, in turn, is absolutely proven to be the ground principle of all philosophy when a satisfactory system of philosophy is actually erected upon it.

What, now, must a system of philosophy do, and how shall we know when it is satisfactory? Philosophy is to explain experience, and it is satisfactory as a system when every fact of experience, regarded as a conditioned fact, can be traced back through all intermediate conditioned and conditioning facts, to the first principle as the unconditioned, upon which all conditioned facts of experience must ultimately depend; and if, in reverse order, starting from the ground principle, every fact of possible conscious experience can be either deduced, or both deduced and proven from it. Starting from any fact of common experience, we trace it back to the most fundamental principle in common consciousness, which principle we postulate as the ground principle of all philosophy.¹ Moving now from this principle, *and with absolutely no reference to the facts of experience*, we arrive, by means of a series of deductions and proofs, at a state of things corresponding exactly to our actual experience. Every fact of experience is included in our deduction, which was made with no reference to the facts of experience. We have gone from experience, the conditioned, to the ground principle, the unconditioned, and then, having reversed

¹ Grundlage, Werke I., 92.

the order of procedure, we have gone from the ground principle by means of a series of deductions and proofs, back to experience. If such a course of thought is possible, then it forms a satisfactory system of philosophy, for it explains all experience. Now, such a course of thought is possible, for we have actually accomplished it, hence our postulated first principle is proven to be the real first principle, and the system of philosophy erected thereon is proven to be the correct philosophy.

But, although Fichte, in many passages, thus urges the demonstrated correctness of his system as a whole, he nevertheless asserts very definitely elsewhere, that it can never be completely proven in detail, but that, at most, it is only probably correct. True, the probability of its correctness may be, and indeed is, very great, and one who doubts the correctness of the system "may well be required to show the error in our conclusions; but it will never do to lay claim to infallibility."¹ The system as a whole, and the general principles of it may be correct, and yet the details of it may be wrong. Correct general results may be obtained by means of counter-balancing mistakes, as, for example, the sum of a series of numbers may be correct, while, in the process of adding, two or more mistakes, counter-balancing one another, may have been made; or, the correct sum may have been obtained by chance. The system of the human mind, of which the *Wis-*

¹ Grundlage, Werke I., 76.

senschaftslehre professes to be an exposition or a representation, is undoubtedly correct, and, if our philosophy be a correct representation of this, then it, too, is correct. But this is the very point in question, and of it we can never be certain.¹ Fichte's real view concerning the validity of his system seems to be that he regarded it as completely proven in its main outlines, negatively by the clear insufficiency of the only other possible system, and positively by the fact that, so far as worked out, his own system does afford a satisfactory explanation of all experience. But he does not, on theoretical grounds, claim more than a high degree of probability for it in its details.

¹ Ueber den Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre, Werke I., 75-77.

CHAPTER II.

THEORETICAL PHILOSOPHY.

Turning now to Fichte's own philosophical discussions, it is well to begin with a brief presentation of the method and principles of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, since this is the best known of his speculative works, and forms the basis for all his philosophy. An examination of this treatise here will enable us to see later how his doctrine of freedom is related to the fundamental principles of his theoretical philosophy.

We already have before us Fichte's criticism of the dogmatic school for going beyond conscious experience to the thing-in-itself for the explanation of experience.¹ A thing-in-itself, being without consciousness of being, either within or without itself, is a meaningless, and, indeed, an impossible conception for beings constituted like ourselves. If it exists at all, it must lie beyond the pale of all experience, and it can never enter as a factor in the explanation of experience. "A finite, rational being has nothing outside of experience; it is this that encloses the entire material of his thinking. The philosopher stands necessarily under the same conditions; it, therefore, seems incomprehensible how he can raise himself

¹ Zweite Einleitung, Werke I., 482-483.

above experience.”¹ “I herewith declare it to be the innermost spirit and soul of my philosophy that man has in general nothing but experience, and he attains all that he does attain only through experience, through life itself. All his thinking, whether it be loose or scientific, common or transcendental, proceeds from experience, and has experience in view again.”² By experience, Fichte does not mean all conscious states, but only those accompanied by the feeling of necessity.³ Beyond consciousness we can not go except by abstraction. Philosophy, then, is to give the ground of explanation of that which appears to us in consciousness, accompanied by the feeling of necessity. We must, accordingly, look within and see what consciousness really gives us.

The first words of the *Erste Einleitung*, which was written to explain more fully the principles of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, are these: “Attend to thyself; turn thy gaze from all that surrounds thee and into thy own consciousness (*dein Inneres*), is the first command that philosophy gives to its learner. It considers nothing that is outside of thee, but only thee thyself.”⁴ What, now, does this inward gaze disclose? It reveals, in every act of consciousness, a knowing and a known. I can be conscious of absolutely nothing without recognizing these two elements, myself as the subjective, the knower, and

¹ *Erste Einleitung*, Werke I., 425.

² *Sonnenklarer Bericht*, Werke II., 333.

³ *Erste Einleitung*, Werke I., 423.

⁴ Werke I., 422.

something else as the objective, the thing known. We may regard these various conscious states as so many determinations of consciousness, in which the two factors, the knowing and the known, always appear. A careful comparison of these various determinations of consciousness, or ideas, as we may call them, reveals a marked difference between them. Some appear and disappear at our pleasure. We will their presence, and they are with us. We will their absence, and they are gone. Others force themselves on us, with a feeling of necessity, and we can not escape them. They are present with us, we know not how. They appear as a 'given' something in consciousness, for whose presence we are in no way responsible. Not only do these ideas appear necessarily, but they appear to be just such as they are, and no other, necessarily. We have, then, in consciousness, two distinct kinds of ideas, the one, apparently, the product of our own freedom, the other, appearing as a 'given' something, and forcing themselves upon us with the feeling of necessity.

"It would be irrational to ask the question why those ideas that are dependent on freedom are determined just so and not otherwise; for, since it is posited that they are determined freely, all applicability of the notion of ground is taken away. They are so because I have so determined them, and, had I determined them otherwise, they would have been different.

"But, it is undoubtedly a question worthy of con-

sideration, what is the ground of the system of ideas accompanied by the feeling of necessity, and what the ground of this feeling of necessity itself. To answer this question is the task of philosophy, and, there is, according to my thinking, no philosophy, except *Die Wissenschaftslehre* which accomplishes the task. The system of ideas accompanied by the feeling of necessity, is also called *experience*, internal as well as external. Philosophy has, accordingly, as I may say in other words, to explain the ground of all experience."¹ To determine the ground of these ideas, these determinations of consciousness that are accompanied by the feeling of necessity, is the task of philosophy.

Let us again reconnoitre and see just what point we have reached, and how we have reached it. It is the task of philosophy to explain experience. Experience includes all that appears necessarily in consciousness and nothing more. In every consciousness there are the subjective and the objective, the knowing and the known. The known, or ideas, appear now as products of our own freedom, now as a 'given' forced upon us by necessity. It is irrational to ask why those ideas, which are produced by our own freedom, are just as they are, but we must inquire into the nature of those ideas which are accompanied by the feeling of necessity. The Ego, the subjective, stands opposed to the Non-Ego, the objective, in every consciousness. This Non-

¹ Erste Einleitung, Werke I., 423.

Ego appears as dead matter (*Stoff*), without activity, as opposed to the conscious activity of the Ego. How, now, are we to explain this duality in consciousness? How can the objective become the subjective, or the subjective the objective? This is our problem.

As the case now stands, two distinct and opposed elements appear in consciousness. Philosophical thought requires that they shall be reduced to one, either by referring both to a third something different from either, or, by referring the one to the other, thus making them identical and asserting that they are really one. We are left with these two alternatives, and we must choose between them if we are to explain consciousness at all. If we take the former alternative, we imply the existence of a third something, different from either, existing beyond consciousness. But of what exists beyond consciousness we can know nothing, not even its existence. Hence such a third something can not serve as the solvent of the duality within consciousness. We are driven, then, to take the other alternative, and to say that the objective and the subjective in consciousness are ultimately one. Though always appearing *in consciousness* as separate and opposed, they must be *thought* as one, seen from different points of view. This implies a deception and requires further explanation. Either the subjective must be the same as the objective, and hence itself deceptive in appearance, or the objective must be the same as the sub-

jective, and therefore itself deceptive in appearance. In other words, the subjective and the objective, the Ego and the Non-Ego, are one. But which one? The Non-Ego appears as stuff, inert matter, mere being without consciousness of being. Can the Ego be explained by identifying it with the Non-Ego? No, for the Ego implies not only being but consciousness of being as well, and to explain being and consciousness of being in one, from mere being, would be to explain the higher category from the lower. We are driven, then, to the other alternative; and instead of saying the Ego is the Non-Ego, that is, consciousness is matter, we say the Non-Ego is the Ego, that is, matter is activity; for activity is the only form in which intellectual intuition ever reveals to us the nature of the Ego.¹ The necessary separation of subjective and objective, of Ego and Non-Ego, in consciousness, is called the *form* of consciousness, their necessary union in thought is called the *principle* of consciousness.

We have now explained the duality in consciousness by saying that the subjective and the objective are one, and that one the Ego. But the duality *in consciousness* remains, nevertheless, and hence we are compelled to posit the existence of a divisible Ego which manifests itself now as the finite Ego, and now as the Non-Ego. This divisible is the Absolute Ego which is pure, free, unrestrained activity.

In Fichtean phrase the results thus far obtained

¹ Zweite Einleitung, Werke I., 462, 463, 466, 467.

are expressed as follows: The reflection of the Ego upon itself, that is, the recognition of itself by the Ego in consciousness, means, the Ego posits itself.¹ The recognition of the objective in consciousness means, the Ego posits the Non-Ego.² And the postulating of the Ego and the Non-Ego, the subjective and the objective, in consciousness, as one, means, the Ego opposes in itself a divisible Non-Ego to a divisible Ego.³

We have now reached the most fundamental fact in all consciousness, viz., that the Ego posits itself. Expressed in different phrase this means, the Ego discovers itself in consciousness, the Ego reflects upon itself as real, the Ego is free activity, and it becomes for itself by virtue of this activity. We are to postulate this fact as the absolute, fundamental principle of all philosophy, and we are to prove its validity as such by the erection of a system of philosophy upon it. We have by reflection discovered in the common consciousness, in the realm of experience, this principle by means of which we hope to explain all experience, but we can only be sure of its validity for this purpose when we shall have deduced all experience from it as fundamental principle, and that, too, without any reference to the facts of experience in the deduction. If from this principle of free activity which manifests itself directly in the reflecting consciousness, we shall be

¹ *Grundlage*, Werke I., 98.

² *Ibid*, Werke I., 104.

³ *Ibid*, Werke I., 109.

able to deduce all experience, we shall then have proven from this fact, the validity of our principle and the correctness of our system. Now to the deduction.

Given, the Ego, that is, pure, free, unrestrained activity; required, experience, that is, the objective and the subjective in consciousness. Now, unrestrained activity could never result in consciousness at all, for the essence of the latter is the appearance of a subjective and an objective opposed to each other, a checking of the activity of the Ego by a something, the Non-Ego, set over against it. Hence in order that the Ego, that is, this pure, free, unrestrained activity, may result in consciousness, it must turn some of its activity against itself, against its own original activity; that is, it must posit the Non-Ego. In discovering this fact, and that, too, without any reference to experience, we have deduced the existence of the Non-Ego, that is, of the objective world as it actually and necessarily appears in all consciousness.

In a similar way we may deduce the third fundamental principle; viz., the Ego opposits in itself a divisible Non-Ego to a divisible Ego. Starting with pure, free, unrestrained activity, we found that in order to produce consciousness, this activity must be checked, and since activity is all there is, the only way in which this can be accomplished is by turning part of this activity against itself. We have, then, activity against activity. If the two activities are

equal, they counteract each other and we have nothing left. If the one prevails entirely over the other, that other disappears and we have left again, pure, unrestrained activity. It must be, then, if we are to have any result, that the activity of the one must partly prevail and partly not prevail over the activity of the other. Hence our third fundamental principle; viz., the Ego opposes in itself a divisible Non-Ego to a divisible Ego.

We have now deduced experience in general from our fundamental principle of pure activity. We have found this activity manifesting itself in consciousness in the two forms of subjective and objective, Ego and Non-Ego. But these two activities,—two in appearance, one manifesting itself in two forms in reality,—seem to bear different relations to each other in different states of consciousness. In the act of mere knowing of the Non-Ego by the Ego, the latter is apparently almost passive, while the former forces itself upon the Ego. In Fichtean phrase, “the Non-Ego determines the Ego.” To explain how this comes about, how the objective becomes the subjective, is the task of theoretical philosophy. In the act of mere willing on the other hand, the Ego appears as essentially active while the Non-Ego in its particular determinations, appears as the product of this free activity of the Ego, or again in Fichtean phrase, “the Ego determines the Non-Ego.”¹ How this can be, how the objective can

¹ *Grundlage*, Werke I., 125-126.

follow from the subjective, how from the idea or notion of a certain act, the act itself can be produced, it is the task of practical philosophy to explain.

Once more, and finally, let us summarize this somewhat voluminous introduction. Philosophy must be a unit, all of one piece. It must stand upon one absolute, unprovable proposition. By hypothesis, this principle is the most fundamental fact of all consciousness. Its validity, as first principle, and the correctness of the philosophy to be erected upon it, can only be proven by the actual erection of such philosophy upon such principle. If every conditioned fact of experience can be finally reduced to this ground principle as the ultimate unconditioned, and if, in turn, every fact of experience can be deduced from this unconditioned first principle, the deduction to be made without reference to experience, the principle is proven valid and the system correct.

There is no thing-in-itself. Such a conception is a chimera, and of no value in philosophy. In all consciousness, there appear the subjective and the objective, the Ego and the Non-Ego, the representing and the represented. Some of these determinations of consciousness, or ideas, as we call them, appear as products of our own free will and effort. Others appear without our conscious effort, and force themselves upon us with a feeling of necessity. To attempt to explain the ideas that are the products of freedom, would be irrational, for freedom is itself an ultimate conception. The ideas accompanied by the

feeling of necessity are called experience, and to explain experience is the task of philosophy.

The *Wissenschaftslehre* is the basal treatise of the Fichtean system. It treats of theoretical philosophy, or the theory of knowledge, and of practical philosophy in general. In all consciousness appear two factors, the Ego and the Non-Ego. Thought demands that there be but one ultimate reality. Hence, the Ego and the Non-Ego must be one. But which one? The Ego can not be reduced to the Non-Ego, for activity, the essence of the Ego, manifesting itself as consciousness, is a higher conception than mere matter, the apparent essence of the Non-Ego. Hence, the Non-Ego must be the Ego, that is, the Ego and the Non-Ego are one, and that one the Ego, the essence of which is free activity. Our ultimate, then, is free activity, which manifests itself in consciousness in the two forms, the subjective and the objective, the Ego and the Non-Ego. In the mere act of knowing, of which theoretical philosophy treats, the activity of the Non-Ego appears to determine that of the Ego. In the act of willing, of which practical philosophy treats, the activity of the Ego determines that of the Non-Ego. We now pass to the consideration of this practical philosophy, at the center of which we shall find the doctrine of freedom.

CHAPTER III.

PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY.

The introduction to the *Sittenlehre* of 1798 gives, in clear, compact form, a brief outline of "practical philosophy in general,"¹ together with its relation to the principles of theoretical philosophy. In the opening paragraph of this introduction, Fichte restates the purpose of theoretical philosophy, that "the task of all philosophy" is to show "how an objective can become a subjective, a being-for-itself, a represented being;" and, he adds, that "no one will ever explain [this] who does not find a point in which the objective and the subjective in general are not different, but wholly one. Now, our system represents such a principle, and proceeds from it. Self-hood (*die Ichheit*), intelligence, reason, or whatever one may wish to call it, is this point."²

"The *Sittenlehre* is practical philosophy. Just as theoretical philosophy has to represent the system of necessary thinking so that our ideas agree with a being, so has practical philosophy to exhaust the

¹ Fichte makes no sharp distinction between practical philosophy in general and practical philosophy in the distinctly ethical sphere, but says the moral law is applicable to all "real actions of an intelligent being." His method of treatment suggests such a division, however, and we retain it for the sake of the method.

² *Sittenlehre* of 1798, *Werke* IV., 1.

system of necessary thinking, so that a being shall agree with our ideas and follow from them. It comes within our province, then, to raise the question last suggested, and to show, first, how we, in general, come to regard some of our ideas as the ground of being [that is, to discuss voluntary action in general], and secondly, to show whence especially the system of those notions arises from which a being must follow with absolute necessity, [that is, to discuss distinctively moral actions].¹

"I find myself acting in the sense world. With this fact all consciousness arises; without this consciousness of my activity, there is no self-consciousness, without it no consciousness of anything that is not myself."² To this fact consciousness testifies directly. What manifold is contained in this idea of my activity (*Wirksamkeit*), and how do I reach it?

"One might at first suppose that the idea of *matter* (*Stoff*) co-existing with my activity and absolutely not to be changed by it, the idea of the *properties* of this matter, which are changed through my activity, and the idea of this *progressing change* until the form arises which I purpose; that all these ideas contained in the notion of my activity, are *given* from without, which expression I certainly do not understand; that it is *experience*, or, whatever you may call this nonsense (*Nichtgedanken*); but there still lies something within the idea of my activity,

¹ Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 2.

² Ibid, Werke IV., 3; see also IV., 20.

which absolutely can not come from without, but which must lie within me; which I can not experience, but must know directly, namely, this, that *I myself* am to be the last ground of the change that is occurring.

"I am the ground of this change, means that that and no other which *knows* concerning this change is also the acting; the subject of consciousness and the principle of activity are one. What I say at the beginning of all knowing concerning the subject of knowing, what I know by means of the fact that I know in general, that I can have derived from no other knowledge, I posit it directly.

"Accordingly, so far as I only know in general, I know that I am active. In the mere form of knowing in general is contained the consciousness of myself, and of myself as something active, and this fact is thereby posited directly."¹ We have in the above statement a clear identification of the activity of the Ego, in knowing, with the activity of the self in acting upon the world. The phenomenon to be explained in practical philosophy is the fact that we find ourselves acting on the material world. The hypothesis, by means of which it is to be explained, is the same as that which we have found to be the fundamental principle of theoretical philosophy, viz.: the free activity of the Ego, of which we are directly conscious.

We saw in theoretical philosophy that, according

¹ Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 3-4; see also IV., 20, 88.

to the *form* of consciousness, the subjective and the objective must necessarily be separate and opposed to each other, while, according to the *principle* of consciousness, they must necessarily be thought as one. "In order to be able to say *I*, I am compelled to separate them; but solely from the fact that I do say this, and, while I say it, does the separation occur. The one which is separated, which accordingly underlies all consciousness, and, in consequence of which, the subjective and objective in consciousness are posited directly as one, is absolutely equal to *X*, and it can, as simple, in no way come into consciousness." ¹

Having thus, through reflection and abstraction, identified the subjective and the objective, which appear in the knowing consciousness, we need no longer regard the objective as something 'given' from without. We have also, as a direct fact of experience, identified the activity of the knowing consciousness with the activity of the self in acting upon the sense world, that is to say with the activity of the willing consciousness. If, now, we could in some way come to regard physical activity, activity in the sense world, activity of the Ego objectively regarded, as one with the activity of the Ego subjectively regarded, which produces such objective activity—the two activities being the same in essence, but looked at from different points of view—we would no longer need to regard matter with its properties and the

¹ Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 5.

changes in them, as something given from without. The occasion for such a supposition would be gone, for we might then regard them as one with the knowing, willing self. We would have solved the problem of practical philosophy according to the principle of the *Wissenschaftslehre*. We would see not only how the subjective follows from the objective, but also how the objective follows from the subjective, and we would have found the ultimate ground of explanation in both cases to be the pure, free, unrestrained activity of the Ego.¹ "The presupposition is that [the idea of our activity] is contained in consciousness in general, and is necessarily posited with it. Hence, we proceed from the form of consciousness in general, start from it, and our inquiry is completed if we come back again in the course of our deduction to the idea of our sensible activity."²

Let us restate the problem in other words. In theoretical philosophy we found that the subjective and the objective appear in every consciousness. They are absolutely inseparable and necessary. But, although they are thus inseparable and necessary *in consciousness*, a correct philosophy requires that they be *thought* as one, and that one the subjective, the Ego. In practical philosophy, also, we find both subjective and objective. There is the conscious activity of the self in the act of willing and the consequent physical activity in the material world. Following

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1798, *Werke* IV., 5-6.

² *Ibid*, *Werke* IV., 4.

our natural impulse toward unity of thought, and proceeding according to the principles of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, our problem is, first, to think will and matter as one, as different manifestations of one and the same essence; and, second, to identify this essence with the pure, free, unrestrained activity which we found to be the ultimate principle in all theoretical philosophy, that is, in the knowing consciousness. If we succeed in doing this, we shall have explained the duality in consciousness, how the subjective follows from the objective and the objective from the subjective, and we shall have explained all experience in both theoretical and practical spheres by reference to one absolute, fundamental principle, the free activity of the Ego. As formerly, in the sphere of theoretical philosophy, so now, in the solution of our present problem, we start from the form of consciousness, that is, from the necessary separation of the subjective and the objective, and we shall have solved our problem when we can think them as one, and that one the free activity of the Ego.

Having thus stated in brief outline the problem of practical philosophy, its relation to the principles of theoretical philosophy, and the proposed line of treatment, we proceed to a fuller statement of the facts to be explained.

We have seen that in the sphere of theoretical philosophy the Ego is determined by the Non-Ego, while in the sphere of practical philosophy the Ego determines the Non-Ego. It is worth while to ex-

amine at some length the nature of this activity of the Ego, which, in the one case, is determined by, and in the other case determines, the Non-Ego; and first, let us consider it as determined by the Non-Ego.

To posit the Ego as active in the theoretical sphere does not mean that one ascribes to himself activity in general, but only a determined activity, just such and no other. "The subjective is, as we have seen, through its mere separation, quite dependent on the objective and constrained throughout; and the ground of this its material determination, of its determination in reference to the *what*, lies in no way in it, but in the objective. The subjective appears as a mere recognition of something present before it, by no means and in no way as an active producing of the idea. So it must necessarily be at the origin of all consciousness where the separation of the subjective and the objective is complete. In the progress of consciousness, by means of a synthesis, the subjective also appears as free and determining, since it appears as *abstracting*; and then it is not able to perceive activity in general, as such, but yet it can freely represent it. But here we stand at the origin of all consciousness, and the idea to be sought is, therefore, necessarily a perception, that is, the subjective appears in it as determined wholly and completely and without its own interference."¹

But what do we mean by a determined activity, and how can it come about? It is activity in a cer-

¹ Loc. cit. Werke IV., 6.

tain direction, determined by a certain opposition. Hence, in order that there can be a determined activity, there must be an object, a something opposed, which determines the direction of the activity. "This opposition is represented as the opposite of activity, hence as something which only exists, which lies quiet and dead, which merely *is*, but in no way *acts*, which only strives to exist; and therefore, undoubtedly, with a measure of power to remain what it is, it resists the working of freedom on its own ground, but is never able to touch freedom in freedom's sphere; in short, it is represented as *mere objectivity*. It is sometimes called by a peculiarly proper name, matter (*Stoff*). * * * The idea of a material substance absolutely not to be changed through my activity, which we found contained in the perception of our activity, is deduced from the laws of consciousness.¹

"Further, all consciousness is conditioned through the consciousness of myself, this is conditioned through the perception of my activity, and this through the positing of a resistance as such. Therefore, resistance of the character just given extends necessarily through the whole sphere of my consciousness; it co-exists with consciousness, and freedom can never be posited as prevailing the least over it, because if it did so prevail, freedom itself and all consciousness and all being would vanish."

¹ Loc. cit. Werke IV., 7-8.

In this conception of the activity of the Ego as determined by an opposition, a something opposed, we have found a solution of the problem of theoretical philosophy, viz.: how the subjective follows from the objective.

What is it to be *active*, and what do I mean when I ascribe to myself activity in the sphere of practical philosophy?

“The picture of activity in general, of agility, of motion, or however one may call it in words, is presupposed with the reader, and it can be demonstrated to no one who does not find it in the intuition of himself. This inner agility can absolutely not be ascribed to the objective as such, as we have seen; the latter only exists and remains as it is. Only to the subjective, to the intelligence as such, does it belong according to the form of its activity. According to the form, I say; for the material of the determination, is, as we have before seen, to be determined in an other relation through the objective. The representing (*das Vorstellen*,) according to its form, is intuited as freest inner motion. Now, shall I, the one indivisible Ego, be active; and that which works on the object, is without doubt the real objective power within me. All this considered, my activity can only be so posited that it proceeds from the subjective as determining the objective; in short, as a causality of the mere concept upon the objective, which concept can not be again determined through

another objective, but is determined absolutely in and through itself."¹

In this causality of the concept on the sensible world, in the production by means of a concept or idea, of sensible activity corresponding to it, we have the answer to our question how the objective is to follow from the subjective, a being from a concept; and thereby is derived the principle of all practical philosophy. "Absolute activity is the one predicate belonging to me absolutely and immediately. Causality through the concept, is a representation of consciousness, which is rendered necessary by the laws of consciousness, and which is the only possible representation thereof [that is, of absolute activity]. In this last form this absolute activity is also called *freedom*. Freedom is the sensible representation of self-activity, and it arises through the contrast between the fixedness (*Gebundenheit*) of the object, and of ourselves as intelligence, in so far as we refer the same [object] to ourselves.

"I posit myself as free in so far as I explain a sensible act or a being from my concept, which is in that case called a purpose-concept (*der Zweckbegriff*).² The fact represented above, that I find myself working, is therefore possible only under the condition that I presuppose a concept sketched by myself according to which my activity directs itself, and through which it should be grounded *formally* as

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1798, Werke IV., 8-9.

² See also Werke IV, 71.

well as determined *materially*. We have accordingly here, besides the manifold characteristics already represented above, in the idea of our activity something new which was not necessary to be noted above, and which has been derived herewith. But it is well to note that the previous sketching of such a concept is only posited, and belongs solely to the sensible view of our self-activity.

“The concept from which an objective determination is to follow, the purpose-concept as it is called, is, it will be remembered, not again determined through an object, but it is determined absolutely through itself. For, were this not the case, then I would not be absolutely active, and I would not be so posited directly, but my activity would be dependent on a being and mediated through it, which is contrary to the presupposition. In the course of the developed consciousness, it is true, the purpose-concept appears as conditioned, although not determined through the cognition of a being; but here at the origin of all consciousness, where we *start* from activity and it is absolute, the fact is not to be regarded. The most important result thus far attained is this: that *there is an absolute independence and self-dependence of the mere concept*, (the categorical in the so-called categorical imperative,) in consequence of the causality of the subjective upon the objective; just as there must be an absolute being (of matter) posited through itself in consequence of the causality of the objective upon the subjective;

and we have accordingly the two ends of the whole world of reason joined together. .

“He who comprehends properly this self-dependence of the concept, will receive therewith the most complete light concerning our whole system, and, at the same time, the most immovable conviction of its truth.”¹

From these somewhat lengthy quotations concerning the activity of the Ego in the practical sphere, we learn the following facts: (1) This activity can not be described to one who does not find it in himself, but it must be known directly. (2) It manifests itself in the formation of the purpose-concept, and then, in physical activity corresponding to this concept. This is called the causality of the concept. (3) This original purpose-concept is determined absolutely through itself, that is, it is not determined through anything objective. “There is an absolute independence and self-dependence of the mere concept.” (4) “Absolute activity is the one predicate belonging to me simply and directly.” (5) The sensible embodiment of this self-activity, that is, the objective realization of the purpose-concept, is called *freedom*.

So much concerning the idea and the nature of activity. We are directly conscious of this inner activity in all conscious experience, and especially in the formation of purpose concepts. We are also directly conscious of physical activity corresponding

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1798, Werke IV., 9-10.

to the concept and following from it. But, although we are thus directly conscious of these two activities, they appear to us as two *kinds* of activity. The one is sensible, the other not sensible; and it remains for us to explain this duality in appearance by identifying the body, the material world, with the original activity of the Ego in thinking and willing, if our posited principle of free activity is to serve as ground principle of practical philosophy.

“From the concept an objective follows. How is this possible, and what can it mean? Nothing else than that the concept appears to me as something objective. But the purpose-concept regarded objectively is called will (*Wollen*), and the idea of an act of will is nothing more than this necessary view of the posited purpose-concept in order to become conscious of our own activity. The spiritual in me looked at directly as principle of activity becomes for me an act of will.”¹ The act of willing is transition from the purpose-concept to the actual objective representation of the same in the material world, with the emphasis upon the act of transition rather than on the result.

“Now, *I* am to work upon matter, described above as to its origin. But it is impossible to think an action upon matter, except through that which is itself matter. As I think myself acting upon it, therefore, as I must, I myself become matter; and, in so far as I so regard myself, I call myself a material body. I,

¹Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 10-11.

regarded as principle of activity in the material world, am an articulate body; and the idea of my body is nothing else than the idea of myself as cause in the physical world, hence, indirectly, nothing but a certain view of my absolute activity.

“But, now, the will is to have causality, and, indeed, a direct causality upon my body, and, only so far as this direct causality of the will goes, does the body as instrument or articulation go. * * * * The will is, therefore, to be distinguished from the body, and it does not appear as the same. But this distinction is nothing else than a second separation of the subjective and the objective, or, still more definitely, a special view of this original separation. The will is, in this relation, the subjective, and the body the objective.”¹

There is a possible confusion in the above statements, caused by the reference to the will as the objective when compared with the purpose-concept, and as the subjective when compared with the material body. The difficulty disappears, however, when we remember that Fichte has already identified the activity of the knowing consciousness with the activity of the willing consciousness. The difference is rather a difference of degree than of kind, comparable indeed to attention and will proper of modern psychology. It might seem that in the sentence, “the purpose-concept, *objectively regarded*, is called a willing,” he has carried the idea of will rather far into

¹ Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 11; see also Werke IV., 127-128.

the objective world, and has contrasted the activity of the self in the act of willing, with the activity of the self in the act of knowing, more strongly than the general spirit of his discussion would allow. But, since the knowing act, the willing act, and the material world are ultimately identical for Fichte, the question is of little importance.¹

The problem as to how the objective can become the subjective and what such a thing can mean, is solved in the fact that the objective and the subjective are in reality one, being but different manifestations of the same original essence. Regarded from one point of view, this essence appears as will, from another point of view, as body. Were the objective and the subjective not in reality one, the fact that I work upon the world could have no explanation, for only like can work upon like.

The subjective within me has become the objective, the purpose-concept has become a determination of the will, and, this, in turn, has become a certain modification of my body. "All the manifold lying in the perception of our sensible activity, has now been derived from the law of consciousness, as was required. We find the last member of our deductions to be the same as that from which we started, our inquiry has returned into itself, and it is, therefore, concluded. The result of this inquiry is, in short, as follows: The single absolute upon which all consciousness and all being is founded, is pure

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1798, *Werke* IV., 85.

activity. This activity appears, in consequence of the law of consciousness and especially in consequence of its ground principle, that the active (as Ego), can only be regarded as united subject and object *as activity upon something outside of me*. All that is contained in this appearance, from the purpose attributed to me absolutely through myself on the one hand, to the crude matter of the world on the other, all these are mediating members of the appearance and consequently are themselves only appearances. The one thing pure and true is my self-dependence."¹

Thus ends the introduction to the *Sittenlehre* of 1798, and we now have before us, in abstract form, the whole of practical philosophy in general, with its relation to the principles of theoretical philosophy. We proceed next to a consideration of the principle of freedom in the more definite sphere of individual ethics. This will necessarily involve some exposition of the ethical system as a whole, but only so much of it will be introduced as may serve to give a proper setting to the particular subject under consideration.

In the mind of man there is a felt obligation to do certain things and to leave undone certain other things, absolutely for their own sake, and with no reference to external ends. So far as this disposition expresses itself in man necessarily, that is, so surely

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1798, Werke IV., 12.

as he is a man, it is called the ethical or moral nature.¹ If one merely accepts this feeling of obligation as a fact, without inquiring "in what way and on what grounds" it exists, he occupies the "standpoint of common consciousness" in his knowledge of the subject. If, however, he would know the ground of such obligation and how it arises, he has a "scholarly knowledge" of it. "*Die Sittenlehre* is not *Weisheitslehre*—such is in general impossible, since wisdom (*die Weisheit*) is to be regarded more as an art than as a science,—but just as all philosophy, *Wissenschaftslehre*; it is especially the theory of the consciousness of our moral nature in general and of our definite duties in particular."² Just as it is the problem of theoretical philosophy to explain the necessary consciousness of something that *is* (for consciousness, not in itself), so it is the problem of the ethical part of practical philosophy to explain the necessary consciousness of *what ought to be*. The consciousness of something that *is* in the perception of the Non-Ego, appears not more necessary than the consciousness of what *ought to be* in the perception of duty.³ It is this last phenomenon that ethics has to explain.

To state the problem in other words: In my consciousness at the present moment is a representation of things as they are, of myself in relation to my fellow creatures and to the world in general.

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1798, *Werke* IV., 13.

² *Ibid*, *Werke* IV., 15.

³ *Ibid*, *Werke* IV., 15.

Together with this representation of things as they are, comes another representation of things as they ought to be. In order that this representation of things as they ought to be may be realized, I myself must act, and as a consequence of this activity, my present relation to the world at large must be changed; or, the world must be changed through my activity; that is to say, I feel a certain responsibility for the existing state of affairs, since it is within my power to change it. But between the consciousness of things as they now are, and the consciousness of things as they ought to be, must intervene a third state of consciousness, viz., the consciousness of myself as actually effecting this change. Let us put the case in the concrete. But in doing so it may be well to restate briefly the principles of practical philosophy in general, adding to them certain amplifications and distinctions that shall serve to bring them into clearer relation to the conscious moral life of the individual.

“I find myself working in the material world.” This fact,—the fundamental fact in all self-conscious life,—implies consciousness of the Ego regarded both subjectively and objectively, as will and as body. But will and body are only two different manifestations of one and the same original free activity. Let us consider the nature of this activity in the two forms of its manifestations: and first the activity of the Ego subjectively regarded.

"I find myself only as willing."¹ I am directly conscious of an indescribable subjective activity in all voluntary action.² It is not a sensible but an intellectual activity and it can only be known through intellectual intuition.³ It is nevertheless an object of the knowing consciousness. The act of willing is the objective to which the act of knowing as the subjective, corresponds.

Let us now analyze more closely this consciousness of myself as willing, and see just what it contains. The idea of the act of willing, so far as it applies to the external world at all, pictures the objective realization of a concept previously formed in the mind.⁴ Without the formation of this purpose-concept to be realized objectively, there can be no act of will. But the purpose-concept may be formed without the accomplishment of the corresponding act of will by which the concept is realized objectively.⁵ The formation of the purpose-concept, in the first place, and the objective realization of it, are, by abstraction, separate and distinct acts. The one is an act of thought, the other an act of will, but both are products of one and the same free activity, and in this they are identical.⁶

Since the act of willing cannot occur without the previous formation of a purpose-concept, it is im-

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1798, *Werke* IV., 18.

² *Ibid*, *Werke* IV., 24.

³ *Ibid*, *Werke* IV., 87.

⁴ *Ibid*, *Werke* IV., 86.

⁵ *Ibid*, *Werke* IV., 85.

⁶ *Ibid*, *Werke* IV., 88, 104.

portant to consider carefully the nature of this concept and the manner of its determination, for here we are at the very root of all consciousness. These purpose-concepts are the product of the original activity of the Ego. In theoretical philosophy we found that this activity of the Ego is sometimes determined through the Non-Ego, the result being a necessary consciousness of something that exists (for consciousness). But the fundamental principle of practical philosophy is that the Ego determines the Non-Ego, not the Non-Ego the Ego. Hence, since the activity of the subjective Ego in the formation of the purpose-concept cannot be determined through the activity of the objective Ego or of the Non-Ego, and since besides the Ego and the Non-Ego there is nothing, both of these being but different sides of one and the same original activity, we are driven to the conclusion that in the formation of purpose-concepts, the Ego is determined absolutely through itself.¹ As before stated, it may be 'conditioned' but it cannot be 'determined' through anything but its own activity. It acts so and so, absolutely because it so acts. It determines itself absolutely, and in this self-determination it fulfills the concept of freedom.² It freely makes its own freedom its law, and then, as intelligence, it necessarily determines itself according to this self-imposed law. In the formation of cognitive concepts, it may

¹ Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 43, 88.

² Ibid, Werke IV., 32, 67.

be determined through the Non-Ego. The purpose-concept formed later *may* harmonize with this necessary cognitive concept whose main content is impulse or inclination, but the other alternative is open also, that of forming a purpose-concept that shall oppose the inclination expressed in the necessary impulsive cognitive concept. So much for the activity of the Ego subjectively regarded. We now consider the activity of the objective Ego.

"If one thinks the Ego objectively at first, and, so it is found before all other consciousness, one can not describe its determination otherwise than through a tendency or an impulse. * * * * The objective nature of an Ego is by no means that of being or existing; for, if it were so, it would become its opposite, that is, a thing. Its essence is absolute activity and nothing but activity; but activity, taken objectively, is impulse (*der Trieb*)."¹ The activity of the Ego, regarded objectively, that is, as body, is called sensible impulse or nature impulse (*Naturtrieb*), in contrast with the activity of the Ego taken subjectively, which is called pure impulse (*der reine Trieb*).² This sensible impulse, which is one form of the original activity of the Ego, works necessarily in the body, and the subjective Ego is in no way responsible for it.³ It acts upon and determines the subjective Ego, thus producing consciousness of itself. This consciousness of the sensible impulse is called

¹ Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 105.

² Ibid, Werke IV., 141.

³ Ibid, Werke IV., 125.

feeling (*Gefühl*). Feeling is produced through the activity of the objective Ego, that is, sensible impulse, upon the subjective Ego. The latter is essentially passive until it is determined through the sensible impulse, and, with this determination arises feeling. This consciousness of sensible impulse, this feeling, is also called longing (*das Sehnen*), "an indefinite sensation of need, that is, it is determined through no notion of an object."¹ These longings, as for example, the bodily appetites, appear necessarily, and are in no sense the product of the free activity of the conscious Ego. The latter has no part in their production, but it is, nevertheless, compelled to recognize them.² If, however, the subjective Ego not only recognizes the longing, as it is compelled to do, but reflects upon it freely, and reflects, also, upon that which would satisfy it, thus forming a purpose-concept, the longing passes over into desire (*das Begehren*).³ The feeling of hunger, an indefinite longing, forces itself upon my consciousness necessarily. I may, or may not, reflect upon this longing.⁴ Just here is the point of transition from the necessary consciousness to the free consciousness, and here, morality begins.⁵ If I do reflect upon my longing, that is, upon my hunger, and form the concept of myself as taking the apple which would satisfy the

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1798, *Werke* IV., 106.

² *Ibid*, *Werke* IV., 107-108, 113.

³ *Ibid*, *Werke* IV., 126.

⁴ *Ibid*, *Werke* IV., 130.

⁵ *Ibid*, *Werke* IV., 126-127.

longing, the latter passes over into desire. If, in addition to all this, I freely realize objectively this purpose-concept, the desire passes over into an act of will (*das Wollen*).¹ The subjective purpose-concept, conditioned, but not determined by the necessary longing, freely formed by the reflecting Ego and freely realized objectively by the willing Ego, has become the objective act.

Thus far in our re-statement we are still in the realm of practical philosophy in general, and have not reached the field of ethics or moral activity. The sensible impulse of the objective Ego forms a necessary cognitive concept with a content of feeling or longing. But the pure impulse of the subjective Ego has within it the power of absolute self-determination in the formation of purpose-concepts. It may or may not choose to satisfy the longing that thrusts itself into consciousness.² Or, in the absence of all sense feeling, a purpose-concept may be formed, and the accompanying act of will be accomplished through the free self-determination of the activity of the subjective Ego.

But there now enters the peculiar fact of moral consciousness, viz., a purpose-concept accompanied by the feeling of necessity.³ With no reference to the end to be attained, I yet feel that I ought to act so and so, or I ought not to do the same. Before this the formation of the purpose-concept was a

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1798, *Werke* IV., 130, 138.

² *Ibid*, *Werke* IV., 73-74, 108.

³ *Ibid*, *Werke* IV., 13, 17, 55.

matter of indifference, of mere choice for me. Whether I did or did not produce it, was a matter of my own choosing, just as in theoretical philosophy the freely formed cognitive concepts were products of my own free will. But, to compare the two fields again, as in theoretical philosophy, we form certain *necessary* cognitive concepts, so here in practical philosophy we find certain necessary purpose-concepts. We may avoid the objective realization of them through a real act of will, but we can not avoid the presence of the concepts themselves.

To explain the appearance of these necessary purpose-concepts would be to explain the sense of moral obligation, and this, the purpose of our paper will not permit us to do in detail. We can do little more than give Fichte's own summarized statement of the 'principle of morality' in the abstract:

"The principle of morality is the necessary thought of the intelligence that it should determine its freedom according to the notion of self-dependence absolutely without exception. It is a *thought*, and in no way a feeling or a perception, though this thought is grounded upon the intellectual perception of the absolute activity of the intelligence; a *pure* thought with which not the least element of feeling or of sensible perception can be mixed, since it is the direct concept of the pure intelligence by itself as such; a *necessary* thought, for it is the form under which the freedom of the intelligence is thought; the *first and absolute* thought, for it is the notion of

the thinking itself, and so it is grounded upon no other thought as consequence upon its ground, and it is conditioned through no other.

“The content of this thought is that a free being *ought*; for *ought* is just the determination of freedom; that it should bring its freedom under a *law*; that this law should be nothing else than the *concept of absolute self-dependence* (absolute indeterminability through anything outside of it); finally, that this law should be valid *without exception*, because it contains the original determination of the free being.”¹

The free activity of the Ego as intelligence, has freely made its own self-dependence, its own freedom, its law. Hence its law is its own freedom, its freedom is its law. For it, law and freedom have become identical. That which the intelligence recognizes as being in line with the continued free activity of the Ego, becomes definite content of the law of freedom, that is, of the moral law. That which militates against the self-dependence of the individual, is, by virtue of this principle, excluded from the moral law. This is the test of virtuous action. As thought, the Ego, must, in consequence of its being an Ego, act according to this self-imposed law of freedom; hence, in short, the sense of obligation and the presence of the necessary purpose-concepts. As will, the Ego may or may not choose to realize these purpose-concepts objectively.

¹ Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 59-60; see also Werke IV., 69.

The moral nature or impulse (*der Urtrieb*) is a union of the original pure activity of the subjective Ego, and the nature impulse of the objective Ego.¹ The one of these is an impulse to activity for the sake of activity, the other an impulse to activity for the sake of enjoyment. They frequently come into opposition. Should the nature impulse prevail completely over the pure impulse, the Ego would become a mere nature thing, subject to the law of necessity, and it would thus cease to be Ego. On the other hand, should the pure impulse wholly prevail over the nature impulse, the latter would be destroyed, and as the former would then have no means of expression, the Ego itself would be destroyed also. In moral action both must be united. Hence the moral law, variously expressed as follows: "Act according to thy conscience." "Act always according to the best conviction of thy duty." "Our activity must lie in a series, through the continuation of which into infinity, the Ego would become absolutely independent."²

From this consideration of the facts of the distinctively moral consciousness, we may summarize the following conclusions: (1) As before in theoretical philosophy, and in practical philosophy in general, so here we find as the fundamental element in all consciousness the free activity of the Ego. (2) This activity of the Ego as intelligence, freely

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1798, *Werke* IV., 130, 144.

² *Ibid*, *Werke* IV., 153, 156.

makes its own self-dependence its law, thus giving rise to the necessary thought of the Ego, that it should, without exception, determine its action according to the notion of self-dependence. Hence the sense of moral obligation and the presence of necessary purpose-concepts of what is right. (3) The moral impulse is a union of the pure impulse of the original Ego with nature impulse, and it impels us to act in a way that shall tend to the absolute self-dependence of the Ego, even though such absolute self-dependence can not be thought as attainable in finite time; and if it could be attained, it would only be by the destruction of the nature impulse, thereby destroying consciousness and finally the Ego itself. (4) "The phenomenon of freedom is a direct fact of consciousness, and in no sense a consequence of some other thought."¹ A belief in the objective validity of the appearance is derived in part from the consciousness of moral obligation.

Our purpose in dwelling at so great length upon these facts of the moral consciousness, is to show Fichte's idea of the relation existing between the sense of moral obligation and freedom.² The moral law, the sense of obligation, has its origin in the freedom of the (Absolute) Ego in choosing to submit itself to the law of its own choosing, that is, to the law of its own independence; and the moral law has its end in the final supremacy of the pure impulse

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1798, *Werke* IV., 53.

² *Ibid*, *Werke* IV., 68-69, 91.

over the nature impulse of the individual, that is, in the final independence of the individual as pure impulse.¹ The consciousness of moral obligation, among other things, leads us to believe in the real validity of individual freedom as it appears directly in consciousness.

In approaching directly the problem of freedom, it will be necessary to examine more closely than we have yet done, the nature of the Ego as revealed not in common consciousness, but in self-conscious states. In the meantime let us not forget the ultimate question.

Our problem is to think the self merely as self, apart from all that it is not. Intellectual intuition reveals the self only as willing, as mere will. If I think any object, for example the wall or a table, I am directly conscious in this act of thinking both of my thinking and of the object thought, as opposed to my thinking. My thinking and the object appear not as one but as different.² If, however, instead of thinking an external object, I think myself as object, I am directly conscious of myself as thinking and of myself as thought, as one and the same. Both appear as activity or as mere will. Even though the object, whether it be the table or the self, be forced upon consciousness and thus appear as something 'given,' and hence as necessarily determining consciousness, we are yet compelled to recognize the self

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1798, *Werke* IV., 166.

² *Ibid*, *Werke* IV., 18.

as *active*, that is, as willing in the apprehension of that object. Just what this activity, this willing, means, can be known only through self-intuition. I am directly conscious of it, and "I add to this willing in my thought something existing independent of my consciousness, which should *be* the willing in this act of willing, which should *have* this will, something in which this will should dwell. I am directly *conscious* of this willing, I perceive it, I say. Of this consciousness, of this perception, I become conscious at the same time, and I refer it likewise to a substance. This knowing substance is just the same as that which wills; and therefore do I find myself as that which wills, or, I find myself willing."¹

It is to be carefully noted here that in the statement, "I find myself only as willing or as mere will," Fichte refers to the activity of the self *qua* activity, whether it be manifested in the apprehending of a sense object thrust upon consciousness, or in the act of will proper, the product of which is some modification of the external world. If we may speak of *degrees* of activity, the former illustrates a less active, the latter the most active state of the Ego; but there is activity in both, and this is the essence of Fichte's claim.

The self thought as substance underlying willing and knowing, is not itself a direct object of perception. Only its two manifestations, thinking and willing, are directly perceptible. "The former is

¹Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 20.

originally and directly for itself not an object of a special new consciousness, but consciousness itself. Only in so far as it goes to another object, and is opposed to the same, does it become *in this opposition*, itself objective. There is left, accordingly, as original objective expression of that substance, only the latter, the will; which remains always *only objective*, is never itself a thinking but always only the thought expression of self-activity. In short, the expression which alone I attribute to myself originally, is willing; only under condition that I am conscious of it, do I become conscious of myself."¹

But will as mere activity is impossible alone. There must be something against which the activity is directed. This opposed something always appears in consciousness. Without this duality, the form of consciousness, the acting and the acted upon, there is no consciousness possible. Hence, in order to think the self merely as self, apart from all that it is not, we must abstract from that which appears as the object of the activity of the self. This done, we find that "the essential character of the Ego whereby it is distinguished from all outside it, consists in a tendency to self-activity for the sake of self-activity; and it is this tendency which is thought when the Ego is thought in and for itself without reference to anything outside it."²

The Ego is only what it posits itself as being,

¹ Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 20.

² Ibid, Werke IV., 29.

that is, only what it finds itself to be in reflection on itself. A thing is mere being without consciousness, and it exists only for a consciousness outside itself.¹ The Ego, on the contrary, regarded as thinking, as intelligence, is both being and consciousness of being in one. The distinguishing characteristic of the Ego as intelligence, is that it must know of itself. This knowledge is part of all consciousness. In the common consciousness, however, the self almost sinks out of sight; it is all but lost in our contemplation of the object known.² Only to the philosopher comes a clear consciousness of the consciousness of self. "But all philosophy lies in knowing the subject as such in order to judge its influence upon the determination of the object. This can come only by making mere reflection the object of a new reflection."³ This second consciousness, this consciousness of consciousness, reveals the fact that "the Ego has the absolute faculty of intuition, for just by means of this act does it become the Ego. This faculty can not be further derived, and it needs no further derivation. As an Ego is posited, this faculty is posited. * * * *

"The intuiting (*intelligente*) which just through the postulated [intuiting] act, becomes intelligent, posits the tendency to absolute activity in consequence of the postulate, as—*itself*; that is, as identical with *itself*, *the intelligent*. That absoluteness of

¹ Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 29-30.

² Ibid, Werke IV., 31.

³ Ibid, Werke IV., 31.

real acting becomes accordingly *hereby* the essence of an *intelligence*, and comes under the *dominion of the concept*; and only thereby does it become *freedom* proper, absoluteness of absoluteness, absolute faculty to make itself absolute."¹

How, now, are we to think this freedom, this absoluteness of the intelligence? What is freedom? But first, what is necessity?

A steel pen pressed from without, returns to its normal position as soon as the pressure is removed. In this act it is determined, self-determined, but it is not free, for it is determined necessarily by its own nature. Suppose now we think away this necessity, this subjection to law, of the pen, and find that, now, we know not why, it returns to its original position. May we, in this case, regard it as free? By no means, for although it is determined, it is determined by chance, it does not determine itself. Freedom is not a freedom of indifference. A free being is one that freely determines itself, and we must get the conception of a free self-determination before we have the conception of freedom. The pen is determined through its own nature. "The nature of a thing is its fixed existence without inner motion, quiet and dead; and thus one posits necessarily when one posits a thing and the nature of it; for such positing is just the thinking of a thing. In this quiet, unchangeable existence, one has already included the thought—it lies predestined therein—that

¹ Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 31-32.

under a certain condition a certain change will follow, for one has thought at the beginning, a *fixed unchangeable*. This is the nature of the thing which is not at all independent of it, for the thing is just its nature and its nature is the thing; as one thinks the one, so he necessarily thinks the other also, and one can not allow the thing to exist before its nature, in order that it may itself determine its nature."¹ When one has thought a thing and its nature, he places all modifications of it in a series, of which it itself and all other things with which it is connected, form parts. Modification of one thing means modification of part or all of the others, and that necessarily and in a determined way. Things are changed or produced by other things. "One's perception [of these modifications] is always fixed, and it remains fixed; it is continually only the onlooker, and there is no moment in the series when it could raise itself to self-active production (*Hervorbringen*); it is just this state of one's thinking that is called the thought of *necessity*, and by means of it one takes away all freedom from the thing thought.

* * * * *

"Objectively expressed, all being that issues from being, is necessarily being, and in no way a product of freedom; or, subjectively, through the union of a being with another being, arises for us the notion of a necessary being."²

¹ Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 34.

² Ibid, Werke IV., 35; see also Werke IV., 112-115.

In order to be thought as *free*, a being must freely determine itself. But how is it possible to think this free self-determination? A thing cannot be thought as freely self-determining; for it has no existence apart from its necessary determination, its nature. It is determined necessarily either through itself, as in the case of an elastic pen or of an organism, or through another thing, as in the case of impact of one body upon another. But in order that being shall be thought as freely self-determining, it must be thought as existing before it is determined, that it may determine itself.¹ Only thinking can be so thought, for "thinking is not posited as something with a fixed existence, but as activity and merely as activity of the intelligence. * * * * The free being exists as intelligence with the notion of its real being, before the real being, and in the former lies the ground of the latter. The notion of a certain being precedes that being, and the latter is dependent on the former."²

We have seen, too, that a necessary being is one that issues from being. By contrast we may reach what is required for thinking freedom. "One requires a being not without all ground, for so one can think nothing, but something whose ground lies not again in a being but in something else. Now besides being there is for us nothing but thinking. The being which one must think as a product of freedom,

¹Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 50.

²Ibid, Werke IV., 36.

must accordingly issue from a thinking.”¹ Kant regarded freedom as the “faculty of absolutely beginning a condition.” But how is this conceivable? “The absolutely begun condition is not joined absolutely to nothing; for a finite rational being necessarily thinks only mediately, and so always in connection until he comprehends *thinking* itself. It only is not joined to another being, but to a thinking.”²

The contrast between necessity and freedom, yields, then, the following result. A necessary being is one that has its nature necessarily determined, and it issues from being. A free being is one that fully determines its own nature, and it issues from something that is not being, that is, from thinking.

There is no denying that a thing fulfills the idea of necessity as described, and we may dismiss further questioning concerning it. But we have yet to consider more carefully whether the Ego is the embodiment of a true conception of freedom. Fichte’s thesis is that “only something free can be thought as intelligence, an intelligence is necessarily free.” Following the contrast between freedom and necessity as already indicated, we shall attempt to answer two questions: First, what does Fichte mean by the free self-determination of the Ego? Second, what does he mean by the assertion that a being follows from thinking?

¹ Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 35.

² Ibid, Werke IV., 37.

The Ego itself is pure activity, the two manifestations of which are thinking and willing. It becomes necessary then to ask the meaning of free self-determination of the Ego, both as thinking and as willing.

It lies within the sphere of the Ego as thinking to form both cognitive-concepts and purpose-concepts, the latter only in so far as they remain the mere representation of a possible action. Is it true that in the formation of these concepts the Ego does determine itself, that is, is free? We remember as the starting point of theoretical philosophy the fact that in consciousness there are certain cognitive-concepts which press upon us with the feeling of necessity, while others appear to come and go at our pleasure. Clearly then the Ego as thinking is not always free so far as the content of consciousness is concerned. Indeed, at the very origin of all consciousness "the idea to be sought is necessarily a perception, that is, the subjective appears in it as determined completely and thoroughly, and without its own interference."¹ In the sphere of individual ethics we found also, that certain purpose-concepts present themselves accompanied by the feeling of necessity, that is, with a feeling that they *ought* to be realized objectively. And here again, the Ego as thinking seems to be determined, that is, it does not determine itself. Are there, then, any concepts, either purpose-concepts or cognitive-concepts, which

¹ Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 6.

can be regarded as products of the free self-determination of the Ego, undetermined either by another thinking being or by some external object? Fichte does not treat this question at great length, the reason doubtless being, that for him the problem of philosophy was not the discovery of relations between subjective states or objective conditions, but between the subjective and the objective as such. It was his business to explain experience; that is, those states of consciousness that were accompanied by the feeling of necessity. There can be no doubt, however, that he regards consciousness as 'conditioned' though not 'determined' externally. "The Ego, just because it is an Ego, has a causality upon itself, that of reflecting upon itself, or the faculty of reflection."¹ This striving (*das Streben*) of the Ego resulting in reflection, is necessary to the very existence of the Ego as intelligence. The activity of the Ego is the original upon which the possibility of reflection depends.

"From this follows then most clearly the subordination of theory to practice; it follows that all *theoretical* laws are grounded upon *practical*, and since there is but one practical law, upon one and the same law; it [Fichte's own] is therefore the most complete system in all existence; it follows that if the impulse should be increased, there would be an increase of discernment, and vice versa; there follows the absolute freedom of abstraction and reflexion,

¹ Grundlage, der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre, Werke 1., 293.

even in theoretical relations, and the possibility of *conscientiously* directing the attention to one thing and abstracting it from something else, without which there is no morality. Fatalism, which is grounded on the fact that our willing and acting are dependent upon the system of our ideas, is destroyed at the very root, since here it is shown that the system of our ideas again depends upon our impulse and our willing; and this is the only way to refute it thoroughly."¹

It is within the sphere of the Ego as will that Fichte is concerned to show its power of absolute self-determination. Whether the purpose-concepts are free or necessary, the realization of them in the objective world is certainly, according to Fichte, a matter of free choice.² "Every member of a natural series is one previously determined, it is determined according to the laws of the mechanism or of the organism. One can, if one knows completely the nature of the thing and the law according to which it acts, predict to all eternity how it will express itself. What will occur in the Ego from the time when it becomes Ego and only remains really Ego, is not previously determined, and it is absolutely indeterminable. There is no law according to which free self-determinations follow and can be foreseen, because they depend upon the determination of the intelligence; but this is, as such, absolutely free, is

¹ Grundlage, der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre, Werke I., 294-295.

² Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 112-113, 159, 161, 162.

nothing but pure activity. A nature series is fixed. Every member in it does all that it can. A series of determinations of freedom consists of leaps and goes by starts, as it were. Think a member in such a series as determined, and call it A. From A on, there may be many possible determinations; however, not everything possible but only the determined part of the same, equaling X, follows. In the one case, all hangs together in a strong chain, in the other, the agreement is broken at every member. In a nature series every member can be explained. In a series of determinations of freedom, none can be explained, for every one is a first and absolute. There the law of causality prevails, here the law of substantiality, that is, every free conclusion is itself substantial, it is what it is absolutely through itself."¹

I am directly conscious of the presentation of two possible courses of action. I choose between them and perform the chosen one. In so doing, the Ego freely determines itself. If the alternatives are throwing the ball and putting it into my pocket, and I do the former, the Ego, the self, the intelligence is, at the moment of throwing, determined in a different way from what it would have been, had I put the ball into my pocket. The existence of the Ego as activity in the concept prior to the corresponding objective activity, makes possible the conception of the self-determination of the Ego, and as it had the power of choice between different forms of self-de-

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1798, Werke IV., 134-135.

termination, we may conclude that it fulfills the conditions of a free self-determination. By this free self-determination, Fichte means the power to realize objectively, by an act of free choice, any one of two or more courses of action presented as possible, the only ground of the action being the purpose-concept which it fulfills.

This brings us to our second question, viz., what can it mean that a being issues from thinking? Fortunately Fichte is very explicit here, and there can be no doubt that he means the absolute beginning of a series of nature causes. "Reality, where its ground is a concept, is called a product of freedom."¹ "The causality of nature has its limits; if there should be causality beyond these limits, it must necessarily be of another kind. What follows upon an impulse, nature does not effect, for it is spent with the creation of the impulse; I act, it is true, with a power which is derived from nature, but which is no more *its* power but *mine*, because it has come under the dominion of a principle lying beyond all nature, under that of the concept."²

"Let us posit a nature power, equaling X. Since it is a nature power, it works mechanically by necessity, that is, it always produces what it can produce by virtue of its nature under these conditions. The expression of such a power is, if it equals A, necessarily equal to A, and it would be contradictory to suppose instead of it something else, *e. g.*—A.

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1798, *Werke* IV., 134.

² *Ibid*, *Werke* IV., 135.

“Now is this law applicable to the will? First, what is most essential and what I have distinctly enjoined above, not without reason; where the will, where the Ego in general enters, there is nature-power wholly at an end. *Through it [nature power] neither A nor -A is possible. Through it nothing at all is possible*; for its last product is an impulse and it has no causality. Therefore not to a nature-power but to the will which is absolutely opposed to it, are A and -A equally possible. Then, if it is claimed that the will is free, it is claimed that it is the first, the beginning member of a series, therefore it is determined through nothing else, consequently nature could not be the ground of its determination, as I have shown also from nature itself; therefore, that the determination of the will has no ground outside of itself. It is claimed further that the will does not, as a mechanical power, do all that it can; but it consists in a faculty to *limit* itself through itself in a definite way; and that therefore, if the whole sphere were A -A, it is within its power to determine itself to the first part or to the last, without any ground lying outside itself.”¹

It is clear that by the issuing of a being from a willing, Fichte means the absolute creation of a new natural series through acts of thinking. The willing as first cause starts a new series of necessary causes in the objective world. For Fichte, then, the freedom of an intelligence, as distinguished from the

¹ Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 160; see also pp. 134-5, 139, 182.

necessity of a mere thing, consists first in the faculty of absolute choice between two or more alternative courses of action present in idea before the mind, and, secondly, in the power to realize objectively such chosen represented action through the absolute power of the will as first cause.

So firm is he in his conviction, that he makes the free activity of the Ego in the practical sphere the fundamental fact to which the whole sphere of theoretical philosophy must be subject. The most fundamental fact in all theoretical philosophy is the activity of the self, by virtue of which alone, the self becomes an intelligence and knowledge is possible at all. But this activity of the self is even more apparently fundamental in the practical sphere than in the theoretical. Hence the subordination of the latter to the former. The distinguishing characteristic of the intelligence as such is the faculty of free activity, the highest manifestation of which is not in mere knowing (*Denken*), but in willing (*Wollen*), that is, in the creation of something that may be known.

"In order to be able to go out from itself, the Ego must be posited as overcoming the opposition. And so there is here again claimed, only in a higher meaning, the primacy of the reason in so far as it is practical. Every thing proceeds from activity, and from the activity of the Ego. The Ego is the first principle of all motion, all life, all action and occurrence. If the Non-Ego works upon us, it happens

not at our command but at its own; it works through opposition which would not be if we had not first worked upon it. It does not apprehend (*angreifen*) us, but we apprehend it."¹ "All theoretical laws are grounded upon practical laws," and the fundamental principle in practical philosophy is, consequently, the fundamental principle of all philosophy.

We have thus far based our discussion of the ethical question upon the *Sittenlehre* of 1798 principally, but the exposition will not be complete without an examination of the *Sittenlehre* of 1812. The latter was certainly written from a different point of view from that of the former. The two treatises have sometimes been compared and their differences cited, to show that Fichte's later philosophy is radically different from his earlier. The point of view and the meaning of the terminology common to the two works, are certainly very different, but if due regard be had for these differences, we believe the two treatises will be found to be in substantial agreement so far as the doctrine of freedom is concerned.

The *Sittenlehre* of 1798 was written from a psychological standpoint, and it contains an exceedingly keen analysis of consciousness. The treatise of 1812 was written from a metaphysical point of view, and the author is concerned in it to treat the fundamental problems of ethics in their relation to a doctrine of being. Indeed, he says that "what has formerly been called *Sittenlehre* has been changed into *Seins-*

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1798, Werke IV., 93; see also p. 172.

lehre; (into the doctrine of true being, of reality proper)."¹

In the earlier work, the Ego is the all-important thing, and the purpose-concept with the corresponding action is the product of the Ego's activity; in the later treatise the pure or absolute concept is the primary element, and it gives rise to the external world and to the Ego which, as "true Ego," serves as the expression of the pure or absolute concept, and brings to consciousness the objective concept.

In the earlier work the concept presupposes the Ego, and is the product of its activity; in the later one, the concept is the ground which, by a process of self-determination, yields both the Ego and the world.² It is the absolute Ego of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, and is the embodiment of rational will, with the power of creating or becoming that which, as rationality, it sees.

In the *Sittenlehre* of 1798 Fichte says that "the concept of freedom rests upon the fact that I ascribe to myself the power of realizing X or -X; therefore that I can unite these contradictory determinations as contradictory, in one and the same thinking."³ In the later work he emphasizes the thought that "freedom is only the causality of the concept,"⁴ though at times he seems to admit the possibility of an act of will that does not realize the pure concept.⁵

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1812, Werke XI., 34.

² *Ibid*, Werke XI., 10.

³ *Sittenlehre* of 1798, Werke IV., 82.

⁴ *Sittenlehre* of 1812, Werke XI., 20.

⁵ *Ibid*, Werke XI., 36, 37, 66.

A more careful consideration of the use of these three terms,—concept, Ego, and freedom,—is required, in order that we may understand the position taken in the *Sittenlehre* of 1812.

There are two kinds of concepts clearly distinguished. The one is spoken of as ‘pure,’ the other as ‘objective.’ The former is the metaphysical ultimate, the ground of the world and of all reality; the latter is the psychological notion present to the individual consciousness. “The concept is ground of the world or of reality. World or reality here means the object of a picture, or of a something represented in a picture, which shows itself in consciousness as the picture of the thing represented, and therefore as not existing if the thing represented does not exist. The thing represented, on the contrary, is regarded as being able to exist without this picture. Therefore the world or being, means the object of a picture that is not pure.”¹ “We have therefore two pictures of all concepts, the independent and pure, and the objective, the copy or image.”² “The *pure* concept becomes ground of the *objective* concept in consciousness. The concept in one sense becomes ground of itself in another sense.”³ In other words, the concept as metaphysical ultimate, creates the world of matter on the one hand and the world of individual consciousness on the other; and the world of matter, acting on the senses, produces

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1812, Werke XI., 5.

² *Ibid*, Werke XI., 6.

³ *Ibid*, Werke XI., 6.

sensations, notions, 'concepts,' in the consciousness of the individual. This latter use of the term, 'concept,' corresponds in general to its use in the *Sittenlehre* of 1798.

The word 'Ego' is used in two senses also, though its use as 'true Ego' (*das wahrhafte Ich*), is by far the most frequent and most important. "The Ego is the life of the absolute concept, the true Ego must, therefore, appear only as such throughout and as nothing else than the objectified concept represented in an existence; or, as the Bible expresses it, the Word becomes flesh."¹ "The Ego *ought*; its essence is this ought, nothing more throughout; it is nothing else than just this life of the concept. It is therefore exhaustively determined through the concept, through which it is created. The concept is therefore author and creator of the Ego in its entire significance. * * * * The Ego, however, should create (perhaps also can only create) according to the concept."² The second notion of the Ego is indicated by the following statements: "We say the true Ego must appear so and so. It is presupposed therefore as the connecting point of the contrary, that the Ego is also able to appear not so, and yet to appear; still it is posited at the same time that this last is not the true Ego, but only an empty and idle image of it. Immorality is therefore, in such a doctrine, the true and pure nothing."³ "Therefore the

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1812, Werke XI., 36.

² *Ibid*, Werke XI., 28.

³ *Ibid*, Werke XI., 36.

true Ego must appear only as life of the concept. An Ego in whose consciousness any other principle than the absolute concept should appear, would, in so far, not be a true Ego, but the mere semblance of it. But that such another principle can appear in consciousness, is surely posited through the visibility of the pure life, by means of the principle of contradiction."¹ That is, the Ego, the individual self, can act without expressing the life of the pure concept, without obeying the moral law; but such action is accompanied by the loss of its true dignity as the expression of the life of the pure or absolute concept, and hence it ceases to be Ego in the better sense.

The notion of freedom is logically consistent with the notions of the pure concept and the true Ego. "Freedom is only causality of the concept."² "Freedom is properly the absolute transition from the pure imaginary form into the objective form *within* consciousness."³ "Freedom, self-determination, and willing are indeed only the transition from ideality to reality."⁴ To say that the Ego is free, is to say that it has the power to realize or not to realize objectively, the pure concept, the should (*das Soll*), the ought.

With this new use of old terms in mind, let us proceed to Fichte's discussion of freedom in the second ethical treatise.

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1812, Werke XI., 37.

² *Ibid*, Werke XI., 20.

³ *Ibid*, Werke XI., 29.

⁴ *Ibid*, Werke XI., 27.

The first *Sittenlehre* was defined as "the theory of the consciousness of our moral nature in general and of our definite duties in particular." The *Sittenlehre* of 1812 assumes at the beginning a principle deduced by the *Wissenschaftslehre*, viz., that "the concept is the ground of the world, with the absolute consciousness that it is so. * * * * The concept in opposition to the world, is a mere image, to which nothing corresponds and which, as a something to which nothing corresponds, presents itself to consciousness. Therefore, to this in the concept, to this absolutely figurative, we look here in the concept. Concept means for us, therefore, a pure, self-dependent being, not a copy or imitation, but an absolutely first, not a second."¹ "The concept is the ground of being; being becomes, is absolutely created through the concept. All being is created through the concept, there is no being except through it. In the *Sittenlehre*, therefore, the world of the concept, of the spirit, is the first, the only true world. That of being, on the contrary, is only the second, first existing through that of the spirit. The *Sittenlehre* must therefore claim a pure world of spirit and proceed from this as the only true one. Ethical and moral just mean spiritual and in the spirit. He who does not grant this at the first, for him the word morality has no meaning."² Our present task is the analysis of a consciousness in which the concept directly in-

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1812, Werke XI., 1.

² *Ibid*, Werke XI., 6.

tuits itself as causality or ground of being. "The concept intuit itself as causality (*Grundseiend*), means, it sees itself as passing over from inactivity and unreality to reality."¹ "Absolute identity of seeing and life is the Ego; therefore the life of the concept for causality, takes on in consciousness the Ego-form necessarily, and it changes itself in causality into such."² "The synthesis of the concept with that of absolute self-determination as a fact, is called an act of will; the faculty of absolute self-determination with reference to a concept is called will or the faculty of will in general. The Ego therefore can will."³ "It has become completely clear that the Ego with its ideal life and its real objective power, is nothing but the life of the concept in which it is grounded. It is not something in itself and a life of its own, but it is only the life and power of this concept. * * * The Ego, therefore, considered as free and self-dependent,—it is this, however, only as power of self-determination,—is there only to procure for the concept its causality; and this is solely its vocation, the purpose of its being; therefore it *should* will."⁴ "The Ego is just entirely the expression and agent of the concept, to procure for it what it, as ideal, is not able to secure."⁵

"Therefore the described Ego can will and it is free to will or not. One may call this freedom of

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1812, Werke XI., 10.

² *Ibid*, Werke XI., 17.

³ *Ibid*, Werke XI., 19-20.

⁴ *Ibid*, Werke XI., 22.

⁵ *Ibid*, Werke XI., 23.

the will, only it must be rightly understood; the Ego is not free to have the concept or not to have it, for it has it through its mere existence, and the Ego is merely the ideal life of the concept. But still it is free, that is, it depends upon its absolute self-determination within its already given being, to determine itself to becoming causality. The addition of this self-determination is willing; it is therefore free, in general, to will or not; its being is indifferent with respect to the act of will, and there is involved in it neither that there is will nor that there is not. It does not will, means, it remains in a condition of mere ideal observation and construction; and this it can do.

“But by no means does the proposition mean that the will is *qualitatively* free, to will in general this or that. For, first, will and freedom are only the transition from the ideal to the real, therefore from the condition of the concept to the realization of the same. Freedom is only causality of the concept, a principle which clearly has not been well comprehended heretofore, as Kant has already well shown. Secondly, that the will is *qualitatively* free, must therefore mean, that there lie before it several concepts whose ground it can be, choosing freely among them. But this is, according to our presupposition, impossible; since there is given a definite concept and nothing besides it, and of this definite concept it is the ground or it is not. If it is not, then it is in general not ground and in general it

does not will. It avoids a multitude of confusions to obtain this notion of the much discussed freedom of the will.

"We abstract here wholly from the sphere of the empirical, that is, from an objective being not produced through freedom. The Ego is for us throughout only the vigorous imaging life of the pure concept, and we know no other Ego; (and how well we have done therein for the purity and comprehensibility of our science in taking this course, will be shown further). He who confuses the empirical here and in the doctrine of the will, will say perhaps that there are two concepts in the case of an act of will, the pure, and that which the nature impulse gives. Accordingly, the self-determination is free to follow the one or the other; and so the will is also *qualitatively* free, there is freedom of choice between the selfish and the unselfish impulses, as they call all this in a highly perverse way. To which I answer that this only escapes them, how in the empirical sphere and under the rule of impulse, there is no willing and no freedom and no self-determination, but a mere determinability through the factual law; that therefore the whole pretence is, in principle, nothing; and there remains the claim presented by us."¹

This direct denial of qualitative freedom seems to contradict the statement of the earlier treatise that the Ego has the power of choosing between concepts. But a careful study of this declaration,

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1812. Werke XI., 20-21; see also Werke XI., 49.

with due regard for the new use of terms, shows no contradiction.

The concept is the primitive ultimate, the embodiment of rationality and will, the Absolute Ego of the earlier treatise, which comes to consciousness in individuals; it is the pure activity, the ought (*das Sollen*) of the Absolute. The Ego as 'true Ego' is nothing but the life of the concept. It is the manifestation of the pure activity, of the ought of the Absolute. It is Ego by virtue of the fact that it is the embodiment of rationality and will, and it is 'true Ego' only in so far as it acts rationally, that is, in accordance with the moral law. Freedom is only causality of the concept, the transition from the ideal to the real, therefore from the condition of a mere concept to the realization of it.

This use of old terms with a new meaning is exceedingly confusing, and it is the source of much of the misunderstanding of Fichte's philosophy. But nevertheless, if we accept in good faith the new use of terms, and also have regard for the changed point of view, the position taken is not inconsistent with that of the earlier writings. If the Ego,—the 'true Ego' is evidently meant,—exists only by virtue of its rationality, that is, as expression of the concept, and this rationality constitutes the moral law, then of course, the will can not be qualitatively free, that is, have the power to choose between several concepts; for, in a given case, reason as 'ought' can present not several concepts (which would be con-

tradictory), but only one. Hence the only power of choice left is that between realizing and not realizing the one concept necessarily present; and this, Fichte grants. One is prone to wonder at this point, however, how such an Ego as has been described, could remain inactive in the presence of duty, (that is, with the one concept necessarily present), and still retain its dignity as Ego. But when we remember that Fichte is discussing the concept as ground of the world, that is, as a metaphysical ultimate, rather than the morality of the individual, the importance of the question *for Fichte* seems not so great. With such a definition of the Ego as he here gives, that is, as life of the pure concept, certainly no one would claim for it more freedom than he grants, that is, the power to realize or not to realize the concept of duty necessarily present to it; but one feels that the conception of the Ego is at fault. However, the denial of 'qualitative' freedom to the Ego considered as life of the absolute concept, does not necessarily imply the denial of 'qualitative' freedom to the Ego which includes all conscious life. The whole discussion is brought within much narrower compass than that of the earlier treatise, and, while it cannot be said to contradict the latter, it adds nothing of importance.

The doctrine of freedom as given in the *Sittenlehre* of 1812 may be summarized as follows. The pure or absolute concept is the ground of all reality. The Ego is Ego only in so far as it is the life of the absolute concept. A concept appears in con-

sciousness, we know not how, as an ideal which 'ought' to be realized, that is, it appears as the moral law. To the Ego as 'true Ego' no other concept can be present, for this one is the manifestation of the life of the absolute concept, hence the Ego is not free to choose between several concepts, but only to choose whether it will or will not realize the one actually present. In so far the will is free; for freedom is just the transition from ideality to reality, from the concept to being. The prevailing purpose of the treatise is to show that the spiritual world as embodied in the concept, is the first, original, and only true world, and from it the objective world originates.

For the Ego as 'pure Ego' there is no qualitative freedom, that is, no power of choice in the realization of concepts, since only one concept can be present. The Ego may choose to act contrary to the pure concept, but in so doing, it ceases to be pure Ego and passes at once beyond the sphere of the current discussion. But the possibility of so choosing is itself the assurance of freedom as the power of possible choice between two or more courses of action.

We take leave of the *Sittenlehre* of 1812 with the feeling that it adds nothing of importance to the doctrine of freedom, as discussed in the *Sittenlehre* of 1798. The latter treatise constitutes a metaphysic of ethics rather than a systematic treatment of the science of ethics. Its purpose seems to be to construct an ethic upon a given metaphysic, with the emphasis on the latter.

PART II.—CRITICISM.

THE DOCTRINE EXAMINED.

We have thus far attempted to give little more than a faithful exposition of Fichte's doctrine of freedom. It remains for us to examine the theory critically that we may reach some conclusion as to its consistency and its validity.

We must face at the outset the question whether Fichte really intended to advocate the freedom of the individual as such. Freedom he certainly does believe in and that most earnestly, but whether it is the freedom of the individual, or only that of the Absolute in the super-actual choice of coming to consciousness, is the question. Taking his philosophy as a whole, his discussion of the subject is seriously confusing. Many statements may be found in which he unequivocally affirms the freedom of the individual, while perhaps an equal number could be found in which he as plainly denies the same. The explanation of the apparent contradiction lies partly in the equivocal use of terms, and partly in the fact that he writes now from one point of view and now from another. It would be much easier to convict him of obscurity in the discussion, than of contradiction in the positions taken.

The Ego as Absolute Ego is undoubtedly free in the super-actual choice of coming to consciousness. On this point there can be no difference of opinion. The individual Ego, regarded as soul and body united, is partly free and partly not free, freedom belonging to the soul in so far as it controls the impulses and actions of the body, and necessity belonging to the body in so far as it is the creature of natural impulse. The individual Ego, as including all conscious volition, the finite Ego of the *Wissenschaftslehre* of 1798, is certainly affirmed to be free to choose between the various concepts presented to it for realization, either by itself or through the senses and impulses. The individual Ego as the life of the pure concept, that is, the Ego after abstraction has been made of all empirical experience, the true Ego of the *Sittenlehre* of 1812, is affirmed to be free to realize or not to realize the concept present to it, the only concept that can appear. But such an Ego is not the common, sinful Ego of every day life, rather is it the personification of the moral ideal. Such an Egohood is an embodiment of the ideally perfect human life, and of the highest human freedom. Of all these Egos there is asserted a freedom that is consistent with the point of view from which the assertion is made. The denial of freedom to the Ego, looked at from one point of view, does not mean its denial when regarded from another standpoint. Neither is the negation of the power of the Ego to become moral, that is, to pass from a non-

moral state to a state of morality, to be interpreted as a denial of freedom. The Ego is rational or moral by virtue of its mere existence. To say that it can not become moral without being born of the Absolute Ego or the pure concept, is no more than to say that non-Egohood can not become Egohood except God first breathe into it the breath of life. The declaration that the Ego can not become moral, does not mean that the Ego cannot pass from a less to a greater degree of morality. It only signifies that morality cannot be born of non-morality. The individual Ego is free, not to *become* a moral being, it is that by virtue of its existence; but it is free to choose the part that shall dignify or degrade its character as a moral being.

It will be remembered that Fichte's notion of freedom contains two essential elements, viz.: the power of free self-determination and the power of absolutely beginning a new series of nature causes. We are to examine the conception a little more carefully.

By free self-determination Fichte means especially the control of the objective Ego, that is, the physical world, by a power which is not subject to the law of necessary mechanical causality, or, in other words, the initiation of bodily movements by a power which is not physical and hence not subject to mechanical laws. The nature of the action of the objective self is freely determined by the subjective self. As stated on a preceding page, he does

not concern himself at length with the determination of the self as thought and feeling, except in so far as these result in action, although he distinctly says that the "system of our ideas is dependent upon our impulse and our willing."¹ His problem is to show "how the objective follows from the subjective," 'objective' meaning the material realization of that which as 'subjective' exists only in idea. Self-determination, then, is objective activity determined by subjective activity in the form of a mere idea, and free self-determination is objective activity determined and initiated by a mere idea which the Ego freely makes into a purpose-concept and then executes. One, or more than one, idea of possible action may be present to the Ego, and any one or none of them may become a purpose-concept. These ideas exist not as purpose-concepts at all, but only as cognitive concepts of possible action, until the self, by the power of its own free choice, unites itself with one of them to make it real in the objective world. This is the very essence of intelligent individual freedom, so far as self-determination is concerned.

And when we turn to the question of the absolute beginning of a new series of natural causes, we find the analysis equally keen. The physical body is within the sphere of being (*Sein*); and bodily activity, however initiated, is from this point on, within a series of natural causes. But, if bodily activity

¹ Grundlage der gesammten Wissenschaftslehre, Werke I., 295.

results from something that is not a natural cause, then in this activity we have the beginning of a new series of natural causes. Now, such activity does result from that which is not material at all, and not a natural cause, that is, from a mere idea. Nay, more, objective activity is but the actual realization of what was outlined in the idea which we regard as its cause. Hence, we have in this idea-initiated bodily activity, the beginning of a new series of natural causes. Fichte's picture of freedom is sharply drawn.

The concept of freedom, as given in the *Sittenlehre* of 1812, includes the thought of the absolute beginning of a new series of natural causes, in the same way as the one just considered, but the power of free self-determination is more limited. The latter is reduced to the power of choice between the realization and the non-realization of the concept necessarily present to it. Such an ideal does not satisfy the ordinary common-sense inquiry as to the freedom of the individual; for the common man wants to know not merely whether he is free to do or not to do the recognized right thing, but whether he can do any one of a dozen recognized wrong acts. Nevertheless, Fichte's conception is consistent with the notion of the Ego of which such freedom is asserted.

The psychological phase of the doctrine clearly centers around the discussion of consciousness as essentially active. The intuition of a subjective ac-

tivity that is in no way sensible, is the empirical starting-point of his whole philosophy. Concerning the fact and the nature of this activity, it is useless to speak to one who does not find it within himself. He who does not *experience* it, will find the transcendental philosophy a closed book, for he has not taken the first step to its understanding. The consciousness of this internal activity is a necessary requirement for self-consciousness. "I find myself only as willing." And this activity or willing is the activity alike of the knowing and of the willing consciousness. In the knowing of external, material objects, that is, in the consciousness that is accompanied by the feeling of necessity, the activity of the self is determined, and it is not so marked as in the more active willing consciousness, but there is activity present, nevertheless, and in all self-conscious states we know it directly. It is the essence of all consciousness. Thus vigorously and forcibly does Fichte promulgate the doctrine of the Ego as essentially active, rather than as something passive which is totally moulded by external ideas and impressions.

Fichte discusses the nature of the Ego from several different points of view, but its activity is always the fundamental characteristic. He does not believe in an Ego-in-itself apart from all consciousness. "That the thinking of an existing self is grounded upon our laws of thought, and that, accordingly, the essence of the Ego for the Ego, in no way the essence of the same in itself as thing-in-

itself, is sought, is presupposed from a knowledge of the transcendental philosophy.”¹ He also speaks of thinking and willing as the only conscious manifestations of the supposed self-substance. He nowhere tells us, however, that this hypostatized self-substance is real, but only that we so think it. Elsewhere, he says, in pointing out the essence of the self, “the intelligence is for Idealism an acting (*Thun*) and absolutely nothing else. One should never call it an active (*Thätiges*), because by this expression is meant something existing in which activity dwells. But Idealism has no ground to suppose something thus, since it does not lie in its principle and all else is first to be deduced.”² But this activity is a constant, and is present to a greater or less degree in every conscious state, and it is the *sine qua non* of the Ego.

Neither does he resolve the Ego into a phenomenal series of mental states, or a mere stream of thought. In one short sentence he identifies the self with its activities, and at the same time asserts that the individual states belong to the self. “My thinking and my acting belong to me, and they are the Ego itself.”³ If thinking and acting, which are, of course, identical with the activity of the self, ‘belong’ to the self, then we must infer the existence of a self which, if not different from its conscious states, is at least more than they. The same

¹ *Sittenlehre* of 1798, Werke IV., 28.

² *Erste Einleitung*, Werke I., 440.

³ *Sittenlehre* of 1798, Werke IV., 107.

position is indicated in his discussion of nature impulse and pure impulse. The Ego acting as thought decides whether the freeing of a nature impulse will be in harmony with the law of its own self-dependence. The Ego as will frees the impulse or inhibits it. In both cases there is activity, now as thought, now as will, but it is always the activity of the *Ego*. The Ego is its states, is in them all and yet it is more than they. It is the subject which *has* them as object. It observes them, unifies them, and compares them.

The discussion of the power of choice in the presence of two motives lends further support to this view of the self as something more than its states. Among several possible pleasures, "I choose the satisfaction of one need. I choose with complete freedom of will, for I choose with the consciousness of self-determination, but I do not by any means sacrifice enjoyment to morality, I only sacrifice it to another enjoyment. But, you say, you still give in, then, to the stronger impulse present in you. Yes, if that were universally true; but this impulse would not be, would not have come to consciousness, if I had not held myself in check, deferred decision, and reflected with freedom upon the whole of my impulse. Accordingly I have, under this presupposition, conditioned the object of my willing through self-determination, and my will remains materially free."¹ There is here implied the presence of an

¹ Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 162.

Ego that restrains its own action, defers decision, and reflects upon its impulses, a self that is more than the states which it possesses.

Nor is the Ego the power to act wholly without motive, the power to become anything in the world which fancy may dictate. The activity of the Ego, although not 'determined,' is nevertheless 'conditioned' by external circumstances. This conditioning is found alike in the formation of purpose-concepts and in the material realization of them. Ideas of possible actions are conditioned by circumstances now present, and by the past experience of the individual as stored up in memory and habit; and the realization of purpose concepts is always under the limitation of time, space, force, &c. But within the limits of these conditions there are many possible modes of procedure, and the self 'determines' itself therein. It is conditioned but not determined by external circumstances.

The same independence of the self is indicated in Fichte's discussion of material, as distinct from formal, freedom. In the latter, the self as distinguished from nature, acts to free the impulse which nature would free if she had the power. "A new formal principle, a new power enters, without changing in the least the material in the series of effects. Nature does not now act but the free being; but the latter accomplishes just that which the former would have accomplished if it could act." In material freedom the self acts contrary to the nature

impulse. "[Material] freedom consists in the fact that not only a new power enters, but also a wholly new series of acts with reference to their content. Not only does the intelligence act from now on, but it acts in a wholly different way from that in which nature would have acted."¹ There is here implied a recognition of the self as intelligence, as a free being, as something different from its states, and with the power of initiating an entirely new series of states. It not merely *is* its states, but it *has* them, and in a certain sense it creates them.

So far as his psychology is concerned, Fichte has a logical basis for his doctrine of freedom. The Ego is activity, this and nothing more. It manifests itself now as thought, now as will. We are prone to think of the self as a substance, in which this activity of thinking and willing dwells. But belief in the existence of such a substance can only be an inference based upon analogy with the material world. In the realm of physical objects we can not think of activity without thinking of a thing that is active. But in the world of mind we have no ground upon which to make such inference. In all conscious states we are directly conscious of the self as a permanent, persisting activity, and beyond this we cannot go. It is not something apart from conscious states, nor is it merely the states themselves as such, but it is activity manifesting itself in all of them, and binding them together into a unity. Within limits,

¹Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 139.

the Ego controls the stream of ideas and through them, actions. The Ego is personality.

We turn next to a consideration of the metaphysical assumptions underlying Fichte's doctrine of freedom. His persistent claim that only a monistic theory can satisfy the demands of thought, that all philosophy must be founded on one fundamental principle to which everything can be reduced, may first challenge our attention. There can be no doubt that thought tends to simplify its materials, to reduce all to unity so far as possible; but it makes an equally imperative demand that any satisfactory system of thought, that is, a philosophy, must account for all the facts of consciousness. If, now, as the ultimate fact of consciousness, we find a persistent duality, thought and being, we may reject a monistic metaphysic on the ground that it does not explain the ultimate facts of consciousness, with at least as much assurance as Fichte shows in urging the necessary acceptance of the same, since only thus can thought's demand for unity be attained. Theories are valueless except as they explain facts, and so long as consciousness exists as the necessary union of subjective and objective, of thought and being, it may well be questioned whether the demand of thought for unity must not find its satisfaction in some other form than that of a monistic philosophy which would resolve either the objective into the subjective, or the subjective into the objective, or

both into a third something, the very existence of which can never be known.

In close connection with this point occurs the discussion of Dogmatism and Idealism, each of which theories claims to satisfy the demand of thought for a monistic system of philosophy. Fichte's reply to the claims of Dogmatism is conclusive. First, mere objectivity, being without consciousness of being, a world of being without consciousness, is an unthinkable conception, and it can never serve as an explanation of conscious experience. Secondly, at most, only more being can ever arise from mere being. Being and consciousness of being in one, can never issue therefrom, for consciousness belongs to a higher category than being. But his reduction of being, the objective in consciousness, to the subjective, does not seem to prevail with the same logical necessity. We may not be able to explain consciousness through being, the objective, but are we any more easily able to accomplish that feat by concluding that the objective is, at bottom, not the objective at all, but only the subjective? In the very act of thought by means of which we attempt to attain this end, we find the objective again making its unwelcome appearance. Like Banquo's ghost, it will not down. Only by an inference that contradicts the universal testimony of consciousness (beyond which Fichte very explicitly says we can not go except by abstraction), can we identify the objective with the subjective, and deny the ultimate existence of the former. One is com-

pelled to regard Fichte as more successful in refuting the pretensions of Dogmatism than in establishing the claims of his own theory.

But even granting that the objective material world could be thus reduced to that which is immaterial or spiritual, granting that the objective may be regarded as the unconscious creation of the subjective activity of the Ego, and hence as only the Ego in another form, there yet remains the very serious problem of so thinking such relations between the different parts or elements of this spirituality as to secure the freedom of both the individual and the Absolute. Granting that the objective material world is but the sphere for the manifestation of the activity of the spiritual world, what is the relation of the finite, individual Ego to the Absolute Ego, of a man to God? This is the most troublesome question in the whole Fichtean philosophy, and it was so recognized by the philosopher himself. Having reduced the objective to the subjective, it is not easy for him to think clearly the relations between the individual and the Absolute, so as to make clear the freedom of both. The Ego is all in all, subjective and objective, creator and created, in one. But this can not be the empirical, individual, finite Ego such as the common man knows, for it is conscious of no such independence, no such dignity and power. On the contrary it is clearly conscious of limitation, of the objective as a 'given' from which it can not escape without self-destruction. The Ego as finite is not the sum

total of reality, nor is it the creator of the objective world. Although this dignity must belong to some Ego, according to Fichte, it can not be the finite Ego, hence there must be an Absolute Ego to which it belongs, which includes both the finite Ego and the Non-Ego within itself, and of which the finite Ego in some way forms a part. This Absolute Ego in its purity as free, unrestrained activity, can never come into the empirical consciousness, but the latter must be thought as in some way identical with it. The Absolute Ego as pure activity has not yet consciousness, it is as yet nothing but absolute freedom, that is, the power to come to consciousness or to remain forever nothing. It chooses the former, and in coming to consciousness it sets part of its own unrestrained activity against itself, thus creating the Non-Ego, the objective world. At the same time the activity of the Ego as such, is manifested as the subjective activity of the finite consciousness. But the pure activity of the Absolute Ego in the act of creation, or in its purity before the act of creation, can never come into the finite consciousness. Its existence in this primary state of nothingness or pure activity, and its activity in the act of creation following, can only be inferred, or, as Fichte says, 'deduced.'

It seems that several objections may be urged against this theory as a metaphysic that shall secure the freedom of the individual. First, and in general, the Absolute Ego as pure activity and in the free act

of creation of the objective world, is as far beyond the pale of common consciousness as the thing-in-itself, and it may just as plausibly be regarded as a figment of the imagination. Fichte says that "the object of every philosophy as ground of explanation of experience, must lie without experience."¹ He relies upon his process of 'deduction' to establish the correctness of his assumptions concerning the pre-conscious activity of the Absolute. But the procedure described is so far different from any thing known in conscious experience,—indeed, it so far contradicts all possible experience,—that we can hardly regard it as more than a clever hypothesis, of the truth of which Fichte's labored deduction is but poor proof.

A second, and for us a more vital point, is that which concerns the relation between the Absolute Ego and the finite Ego after the former has come to consciousness. If the Absolute Ego in the act of creation or 'coming to consciousness,' loses its own individuality, and has an existence thenceforward only in the Non-Ego and in the plurality of finite Egos, and if it possesses consciousness only in the latter, there may indeed be room for individual freedom and personality, but it has been purchased at the cost of both the personality of the Absolute and the monistic system of thought. For, if individual personalities are the only forms of the consciousness of the Absolute, and they are supreme, then the

¹ Erste Einleitung, Werke I., 428.

Absolute has become nothing but an ideal unity of the Non-Ego and finite individual consciousnesses. And if the Absolute has thus disappeared in the Non-Ego and the plurality of finite Egos, our monism has turned itself back into a dualism, or rather, into a pluralism. If, on the other hand, the Absolute Ego is conceived as not losing itself in the finite Egos and the Non-Ego, but as coming to consciousness only in the finite Egos, the latter being mere 'points of consciousness' of the Absolute, it is difficult to see how any place can remain for individual personality, without which there can be no individual freedom.

It is a recognition of the difficulties involved in this problem of the relation of the individual to the Absolute, and an attempt to solve the problem in such way as to secure on the one hand the freedom of the individual and the self-hood of the Absolute, and on the other a consistent monistic system of thought, that caused so many ambiguous, not to say contradictory, statements on this subject.

It is in the more purely ethical arguments for freedom that Fichte appears at his best. Not merely the keenness and vigor of his intellect, but also the intensity of his moral nature are here manifest. The whole argument is based upon a belief in the essential dignity of man as something more than mere nature, upon the unconquerable conviction of all higher natures that man is active, freely active. Accepting the sense of moral obligation as an ulti-

mate given fact of consciousness, Kant had inferred the freedom of the individual as the postulate of morality. But he denied that freedom itself can be directly intuited. He only said that freedom *must be* because morality *is*. Fichte recognized the presence of the categorical imperative, but he did not base his belief in freedom on that alone. Indeed, he did not accept the 'ought' as a mere 'given,' but set about 'deducing' it, and the starting point of the deduction is the intuited activity of the Ego. That the will *appears* as free and absolute, is undoubtedly a fact of consciousness. But, on purely theoretical grounds, there is no reason why this appearance might not possibly be explained, and apparent freedom explained away, just as in the system of Idealism the existence of definite things in space and time, things which *appear* as real to us, are further explained, and, in a sense, explained away. As a matter of fact, no one will ever be able to explain the freedom of the will from anything else. But it might still be claimed that it has some incomprehensible ground; which claim, of course, can not be successfully refuted, although there is not the least proof of its validity.

On purely theoretical grounds, then, the ultimate truth of this appearance of the will as free and absolute, can not be established in a manner that is convincing to all minds; and, if we are to hold it as true, and accept it as the fundamental fact of all philosophy, the decision must be made on practical

rather than on theoretic grounds. "I *will* be self-dependent, therefore, I regard myself so."¹ This is faith (*Glaube*), and so the final ground of belief in freedom is faith in man as active power, just as the final ground of belief in Dogmatism is faith in the thing-in-itself. "The proposition that I *am* free, that freedom is the only true being and the ground of all other being, is very different from the proposition that I *appear* to myself as free. It is the belief in the objective validity of this appearance, that is to be derived from the consciousness of the moral law. *I am free* is the first article of faith that opens the way into the intelligible world and that first affords ground in it. * * * The Ego is not to be derived from the Non-Ego, life not from death, but, on the contrary, the Non-Ego from the Ego; and, therefore, all philosophy must start from the Ego."²

We do not regard it as wicked that the stronger animal should devour the weaker, for it seems natural, within the order of nature. With man it is quite otherwise, for we find it impossible to regard him as a mere natural product. We are compelled to think of him as a free and transcendent being, raised beyond all nature. The fact that man is capable of vice, shows that he is determined to virtue. "But what would virtue be if it were not the acquired product of our own freedom, the rising into a wholly different order of things?"³

¹ Sittenlehre of 1798, Werke IV., 26.

² Ibid, Werke IV., 54.

³ Ibid, Werke IV., 204.

For Fichte, the decision between Idealism and Dogmatism is really the decision between freedom and necessity, and the question at issue is, whether the independence of the Ego is to be sacrificed to that of the thing, or vice versa. The philosopher is compelled to represent to himself both that he is free and that there are determined things outside of him. The *representation* of the independence of the Ego and that of the thing, can very well exist together, but not the *independence itself* of both. Only one of them can be independent, and the other must be secondary to it. From a purely theoretical standpoint there is no all-sufficient ground for decision between them, and since there must be a ground, if decision is made, it must consist of the difference of interest of those who choose. There are two chief classes of men. A member of the one class is accustomed to regard himself as the representation of the outside world, and so he can consider himself as secondary to the world of objects. The other class is represented by the man who realizes his supremacy over the world of objects through his own efforts. Confidence in himself and his own activity destroys his confidence in the Non-Ego as ultimate ground of explanation of the world. He is inclined to look with contempt and ridicule upon his opponent who would find a ground principle in that which he himself has overcome and cast aside as useless. "Hence the kind of philosophy a man has, depends upon the kind of man he is." ¹

¹ Erste Einleitung, Werke I., 434.

Of strikingly similar import are the words of a well-known ethical writer of the present day. "The decision in favor of freedom is thus a kind of 'moral wager'; * * * the odds seem to be on the side of morality and therefore the odds are taken. And probably the question is generally answered on some such grounds, though not so explicitly formulated. The philosopher is the man after all; and the stress is laid on the one side of the question or the other, according to the temper of the individual. * * * While the 'intellectualists' will, with Spinoza, ruthlessly sacrifice freedom to completeness and finality of speculative view, the 'moralists' will be content, with Kant and Lotze, to 'recognize this theoretically indemonstrable freedom as a postulate of the practical reason.' The latter position, if it confessedly falls short of knowledge, is at any rate entitled to the name which it claims for itself, that of a rational faith; it is a faith grounded in the moral or practical reason. Since man must *live* whether he can ever *know how* he live or not, freedom may well be accepted as the postulate or axiom of human life. If moral experience implies freedom, or even the idea of freedom, as its condition; if man is so constituted that he can act only under the idea of freedom; or as if he were free, then the *onus probandi* surely lies with the determinist."¹

The fact that Dogmatism, that is, a system of necessity, cannot afford a satisfactory explanation

¹ James Seth, *A Study of Ethical Principles*, page 352.

of conscious life, together with the fact that men of strong, independent nature and moral sensibility, are compelled to represent themselves as free and independent beings, above nature and superior to it, — these two facts are for Fichte the practical reasons which commit him to the doctrine of individual freedom and moral responsibility. They make possible a 'rational faith' in freedom even though they do not constitute absolute proof of its reality. Scarcely can the ethical argument be said to have passed beyond this point at the present day.

We began this paper with the statement that in the words 'unity' and 'freedom' is to be found the key to the entire Fichtean philosophy. The whole purpose of his life as a speculative thinker was to construct a monistic philosophy that should guarantee the moral freedom of the individual. His keen intellect demanded the one, his intense ethical nature called for the other. He had a supreme faith in the power of thought to solve the problem of human experience. He also believed that the individual must be free. What success, we may now ask, in conclusion, attended his efforts?

His conception of freedom is of the severest kind. It is the power of free self-determination, in which the only causality that is operative is a free causality. It is an 'either—or' determination, and that through the self. It refers to idea-initiated activity, and it involves the absolute beginning of a new series of

natural causes, even though such a beginning may be inconceivable.

His psychological analysis of the nature of the self is exceedingly keen. His conception of the self as essentially will, as necessarily active, as activity itself entering into all conscious states, is the most fruitful conception in modern psychology. He does not believe in the existence of an Ego-in-itself, of a self apart from all conscious states; nor would he, on the other hand, resolve the self into either discrete mental states or a stream of consciousness. Rather would he say that the self is the persistent activity which is in all conscious states, but which is more than they. In so far, then, his psychology provides for a real individual self-hood, a personality, which is the only guarantee of individual freedom such as he describes.

When we turn to the metaphysics of the system, the claims of absolute monism are strongly urged, and the case for freedom is not so satisfactory. Any theory, to be acceptable, must explain the facts involved, and, since thought and being are alike ultimates in conscious life, we may well question the validity of any system of monism that attempts to resolve the one into the other. His argument that since Dogmatism, (the validity of which he conclusively refutes,) can not be true, therefore, Idealism must be true, would be conclusive only on the assumption that Idealism and Dogmatism are the only alternatives, that a monistic philosophy must be pos-

sible; but we have seen that there is good ground for doubting the validity of this assumption. The finite consciousness, of which alone we have any knowledge, contains never the subjective alone, but always both subject and object.

But even granting the possibility of regarding the material world as the mere manifestation of the spiritual world, thus doing away with a belief in the former as an ultimate factor in the explanation of the universe, we find unsolved difficulties in the way of so thinking the relation between the individual and the Absolute, as to secure the freedom of the individual without sacrificing both the personality of the Absolute and the monism in the interests of which all our concessions have been made. The fiction of the Absolute Ego as nothing but pure activity, as nothing but freedom to come to consciousness in individual consciousnesses, or to remain forever 'nothing,' does not impress one with the dignity of such an Absolute, for it is avowedly unconscious, merely nothing. Not even the logic of the 'deduction' is convincing in this matter.

But granting again that this might be the origin of all conscious life, if the Absolute Ego, after coming to consciousness, has no further existence as Absolute Personality, but is resolved into the Non-Ego and the consciousnesses of individual Egos, we may have retained the personality and independence of individuals, and hence a metaphysical basis for a theory of individual freedom, but we have lost the

personality of the Absolute, and our monism has returned into a pluralism. If individual, finite consciousnesses are but points of consciousness for the Absolute which yet maintains its personality, if the individual does not think but only the Absolute through the individual, then the case for the freedom of the individual in the sense of the freedom above described, must clearly be given up. Freedom there may yet be, but it is the freedom of the Absolute and not that of the individual. The reality of individual freedom requires the reality of individual personality. The conception of individual personality as the only form in which consciousness exists, destroys the idea of God as personality. A thorough-going spiritualistic monism, such as Fichte designed his philosophy to be, would necessarily merge the personality of individuals into that of the Absolute, or the personality of the Absolute into that of individuals. Here we meet the final contradiction between monism and freedom, and it is at this point that Fichte's doctrine of freedom may be said to be found wanting. Monism and freedom as he represents them, are contradictory. Fichte tried to hold to both.

It is avowedly on ethical, or, as Fichte says, practical, grounds that he decides in favor of freedom. The appearance of freedom in consciousness might conceivably be shown to be mere appearance. Disregarding ethical considerations, the reality of freedom corresponding to the appearance of it, can

be neither proven nor disproven. The necessary consciousness of man that he has power over nature and over himself, that he is capable of vice and virtue, and conscious of opportunity and responsibility, that he has within himself the power to change the natural order of things,—this consciousness of his own peculiar dignity as man, is the deciding factor in favor of freedom. It is not absolute demonstration, but it gives ground for a rational faith in the reality of that freedom for which man as moral most earnestly longs.

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